Safe and Useful Chemicals Under Attack, Again, as Endocrine Disruptors

By ACSH Staff — November 2, 2007

A recent "health" column in USA Today ("'Everywhere chemicals' in plastics alarm parents," [1] Oct. 30) attempts yet again to scare the public -- especially parents of young children -- about the alleged "endocrine-disrupting" effects of common chemicals, specifically bisphenol-A (BPA) and phthalates. The specific phthalate attacked, the vinyl plasticizer DEHP, is found in many healthcare products, including intravenous tubing and bags, and some instruments used in surgery. BPA is found, most familiarly, in plastic water bottles and baby bottles, but also in various consumer products such as the coating inside food cans and dental fillings.

The authors of this alarmist article point towards "mounting evidence" that these chemicals "may trigger hormonal changes." Their evidence comes entirely from high-dose rodent studies, and of course from the fact that almost all Americans have trace levels of a wide variety of chemicals detectable in their bodies. What many don't know -- and this article certainly wouldn't help them learn -- is that the mere presence of a chemical does not mean [2] that it is harmful. A well-known dictum of toxicology is "the dose makes the poison."

These products have been ubiquitous in our environment for decades and have proven useful in many products. Although there has never been any evidence of human harm from any of them, so-called "environmental" activists persist in trying to get rid of them. A variety of government panels -- both here and abroad -- have evaluated BPA, and none have banned or restricted their use. ACSH did a study of DEHP in 1999, and our blue-ribbon panel concluded that there was no cause for concern about adverse effects on humans from typical exposure to this chemical.

It is sad and disappointing to see a widely-read newspaper like USA Today print alarmist screeds masquerading as "health" columns -- but until scientists who know better speak out against the anti-technology activists and the "endocrine disruptor" zealots, these are the headlines we're likely to keep seeing.

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