

Dispatch: Third-Hand Smoke, DSHEA, Atrazine, Executive Order, Snow Storm

By ACSH Staff — February 9, 2010

Third-Hand Smoke

A team of researchers at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California wrote in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that nicotine in the residue of tobacco smoke – [“third-hand smoke” – accumulates on surfaces and can react with nitrous acid to form carcinogens](#) [1] (as defined by high-dose rodent experiments).

“There is such a phenomenon as third-hand smoke,” says ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. “There’s no evidence whatsoever that it’s hazardous to health, but as an aesthetic matter, it’s quite noticeable if you’re sitting next to someone on a bus who reeks so badly of smoke that you are nauseous. Still, being able to smell something doesn’t mean it will give you cancer or any other disease. I can’t believe we’ve reached the phase in anti-smoking hysteria that we’re now worried about carcinogenic effects of third-hand smoke. When are we going to get to fourth-hand smoke?”

Long Overdue Criticism of DSHEA

The latest issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* includes an invited commentary arguing that it is time to reassess [the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act \(DSHEA\)](#) [2].

“The DSHEA imperils peoples’ health,” says Dr. Whelan. “The makers of dietary supplements get away with saying anything they want. When you think of how closely regulated legitimate pharmaceuticals are when it comes to what claims they can make, it’s ridiculous that these supplements get a free ride.”

“They get around the rules with linguistic sleight of hand,” says ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross. “They say that this supplement ‘supports prostate health’ and that one ‘supports cognitive function.’ They just can’t claim that it is meant to diagnose or treat any specific conditions.”

“The irony is that people who take this stuff are the same ones who are afraid of pharmaceuticals since they don’t want to put ‘dangerous chemicals’ in their body,” says ACSH’s Jeff Stier. “Instead, they’re taking these supplements, and there’s no telling what goes into them.”

Living Anywhere On Earth Is Hazardous to Your Health

[A study presented Friday at the annual meeting of the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine](#) [3] in Chicago suggests that mothers who live closer to a site of high surface-water contamination by the herbicide atrazine are more likely to deliver an infant with gastroschisis, an uncommon birth defect.

“To say that this is a trash study would be too kind,” says Dr. Ross. “They tried to track rates of a very uncommon birth defect over twenty years and link it to one of the most commonly used herbicides in the U.S., meanwhile ignoring the myriad other chemicals in the environment. This is

an obvious case of working backwards from a predetermined conclusion in order to find a link to a chemical of choice. It's the complete opposite of controlled study."

"This is just like the study that tried to link soda to pancreatic cancer, even though that one was at least well-done," says Stier. "It seems like when you have a product that someone wants to ban or tax, whether it's an herbicide or soda or a chemical in plastics, all of these studies come out of the woodwork looking for multiple reasons to do so. Even if a chemical is dangerous under certain circumstances, such as occupational exposure, it doesn't mean that it causes every adverse effect known to man."

Michelle Obama's Anti-Obesity Campaign

According to *Bloomberg News*, "President Barack Obama today signed an executive order to begin first lady Michelle Obama's [national campaign to fight childhood obesity](#) [4]."

"We'll be keeping a careful eye on this campaign to make sure that those initiatives are science-based not driven by ideology," says Stier. "So far, it seems like most of the First Lady's ideas have been very reasonable."

Snow Day Tomorrow

New York City is in for some inclement weather tonight and tomorrow. We will try our best to trudge to work in the morning, but if it gets too nasty, ACSH offices will be closed and there may be no Morning Dispatch on Wednesday. Either way, Jeff Stier will be following breaking news on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/JeffACSH> [5].

"Those who have been following me on Twitter could have been up to speed on this third-hand smoke story last night as it was breaking," says Stier. "I had a very interesting exchange with the editor of Reuters Health.

Curtis Porter is a research intern at the American Council on Science and Health ([ACSH.org](http://www.acsh.org) [6]).

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[1]

http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61753920100208?feedType=RSS&feedName=healthNews&utm_so

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[3]

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[4] <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-02-09/president-aids-first-lady-s-campaign-against-childhood-obesity.html>

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