

PFC study rears its ugly head again but why?

By ACSH Staff — April 7, 2011

Recent evidence indicates that the mass media is not too quick on the uptake when it comes to “studies” purporting to link some environmental “toxin” to health effects in rodents or humans. As a soon-to-be-classic example, this week’s news is replete with a second round of breathless coverage of a [report](#) [1] that didn’t even warrant its initial coverage: the study in question was first published online March 16 in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*. In our March 25 [Dispatch](#) [2], we censured this peer-reviewed journal for publishing a study conducted by Dr. Sarah Knox, a professor at the West Virginia University School of Medicine in Morgantown, alleging that perfluorocarbons (PFCs) — commonly used in products like furniture, carpeting, non-stick pans, plastic food containers and clothing — cause early menopause.

Though some news outlets picked up on the story when it was [first released](#) [3] in March, the study came back with a vengeance yesterday, when [Reuters](#) [4] and [MSNBC](#) [5], among many others, publicized the results yet again. This happened even though Dr. Knox warns that, “It’s a correlation, and correlation is not causation. We can’t say that PFCs cause early menopause.”

“But that is NOT how the headlines read. This is akin to the hexavalent chromium scare in Hinkley, California, where a clever paralegal rounded up a group of people in order to allege various illnesses and extract money from the polluter. Despite the media hype, neither study has any basis in sound science, it’s classic data-dredging,” gripes ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross. “All you need to do is take some kind of health input, like PFC levels in the body, and analyze it against 12,000 different possible health outcomes. You’re bound to find something ‘statistically significant,’ but that’s not the way we do studies, and it’s not science.”

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[1] <http://jcem.endojournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/jc.2010-2401v1>

[2] http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.2474/news_detail.asp

[3] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1369366/Gender-bending-chemicals-saucepans-linked-early-menopause.html>

[4] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/06/us-pfcs-linked-earlier-menopause-idUSTRE7355W120110406>

[5] http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42457468/ns/health-womens_health/