EPA formalde-hides the truth

By ACSH Staff — April 13, 2011

In his article [1] for The New York Times Greenwire, Jeremy P. Jacobs makes our job a little bit easier by pointing out what ACSH has known all along: the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel asserted that the EPA’s chemical assessments have consistently displayed problems, such as a failure to sufficiently describe methods and criteria used to identify evidence for selecting and evaluating studies, and an absence of clear links to an underlying conceptual framework.

In this specific instance, the NAS panel deemed the EPA’s Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) assessment on the toxicity of formaldehyde to be in need of “substantial revision.” These NAS panel conclusions will likely further delay the EPA’s 12-year study of formaldehyde’s toxicity, which the agency alleges causes respiratory cancers, leukemia and several other health problems, including asthma.

But ACSH’s Susan Ingber, who read almost all of the EPA’s most recent 1043 page study draft results, points out that even the NAS doesn’t think there is enough evidence to establish a causal link between formaldehyde exposure and leukemia, “which was, nonetheless, used to estimate the overall cancer risk associated with formaldehyde exposure, along with Hodgkin’s lymphoma and a rare nasal cancer known as nasopharyngeal cancer. According to the EPA, the level of chronic, early life formaldehyde exposure that would lead to a one-in-a-million increased risk of cancer in a lifetime is 0.008 parts per billion.”

In the real world, the risk of cancer due to formaldehyde exposure is minuscule to say the least, observes ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross. “The NAS skewers the EPA in their analysis of the agency’s draft assessment, demonstrating that even though formaldehyde may technically be considered a human carcinogen, its actual effects are minimal.”


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