Chemophobia week, led by the NYTimes, scaring the public about nothing

By ACSH Staff — May 5, 2015

While real health threats abound, including smoking, obesity, diabetes, vaccine denialism and its attendant epidemics, Alzheimer’s Disease just to name a few most in need of consciousness-raising through effective public health education many seemingly responsible, respected groups and spokesmen have decided instead to take the easy path to fear-mongering and alarmism.

We learned in the Sunday Times about the dangers of toxic flame retardants. Well, that subject was at least covered in a section recently added, called Retro Report [1], which might lead one to believe it was just a trip down bad old memory lane. Nope. The article was written by Clyde Haberman, well-known as the NYC columnist at the Times. He has perhaps gotten a demotion to the cancer-scares area. ACSH has a publication on flame-retardants [2], and the drum-banger on this topic has usually been Nick Kristof [1]. To summarize: flame-retardants in household furniture save lives, and the scientific literature provides no cause for the health concerns that crop up like weeds every so often in the popular press.

The very next day, in that same august journal, we find the alarms being raised about toxic formaldehyde [3]. Now, formaldehyde was declared a human carcinogen by the NTP’s Report on Carcinogens [4] a few years ago. However, as is often/always the case, when these chemical scares are resurrected for purposes of selling papers, the concept of dose/exposures are is never mentioned. At high levels, even brief exposures can irritate some folks nasal passages and eyes. These levels are rarely encountered in typical exposures. typically. The cancer risk applies to long-term exposures among embalmers and others exposed to high levels over decades, and even that amounts to an extraordinarily small increased risk.

Another old scare was re-awakened, (yes) again in the NYTimes! Under the banner headline Commonly Used Chemicals Come Under New Scrutiny [5], we learned that pizza boxes contain cancer-causing chemicals [6]! Well, at least we pizza lovers can worry about something other than just getting fatter! The chemical in question PFAS is a certain perfluorinated substance that is somewhat related to a chemical that came under fire more than five years ago when it was accused by a bunch of plaintiff’s lawyers to cause adverse health effects among women living
near the Ohio river in West Virginia. That chemical was used in the production of DuPont's Teflon. Anyway, to again summarize, there is zero evidence that the pizza-box chemical poses any health threat whatsoever to people who eat pizza. Just don't eat the box.

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2015/05/05/chemophobia-week-led-by-the-nytimes-scaring-the-public-about-nothing

Links