

Chemicals In Your Popcorn? asks the Times Kristof. Yes, there are

By ACSH Staff — June 4, 2015



We have often taken note of the Times columnist Nicholas Kristof's rants expressing his concerns about various chemicals and substances he fears in his (and our) everyday environment. Here are some of the issues with which he and we have disagreed over the past 2-3 years:

[HBO's Toxic Hot Seat is toxic all right: it seems to have addled Kristof's brain](#) [1]

[Nutty Nick Kristof flunks chemistry again, and again!](#) [2]

[A science lesson for Nick Kristof of the New York Times](#) [3]

[Kristof frightened of his couch but maybe he should be on it](#) [4]

He has expressed his deep concerns about the usual paranoid, chemophobia targets: endocrine disruptors, BPA (he avoids toxic cash register receipts), flame retardants (he will no longer sit on his couch) among other fears (which we find even more astounding considering he travels the world to the most impoverished areas in his quest to help the unprivileged and oppressed, often women and children, seeming fearless of actual threats such as cholera and malaria).

One thing seems clear from today's popcorn-chemical column: he does read the NYTimes. We say this because it was only one month ago that his employer [ran this column](#) [5]: *Commonly used chemicals come under new scrutiny*. The subject of that news story: PFAs, perfluoroalkyl chemicals, which we all are exposed to mainly from non-stick cooking appliances and surfaces. And lo and behold, that's the same bunch of chemicals that inspire Kristof's alarm. As he puts it:

What do a pizza box, a polar bear and you have in common?

Yes! PFAs! We addressed *that* article [at the time](#) [6], noting specifically that the Times drumbeat against chemicals seemed to reach a crescendo with that day's publication, featuring as it did

fearmongering alarmist stories on numerous chemicals, coincidentally. Focusing on PFAs (which include a chemical involved in the [production of Teflon](#) [7], although that substance PFOA is not actually present in non-stick products), we noted that the concern was generated as a result of [an op-ed piece](#) [8] in the junk science journal Environmental Health Perspectives, co-written by two well-known antagonists of chemicals of all types. There is no scientific evidence impugning PFAs as an actual threat to human health.

Of course, it wouldn't be an authentic Kristof alarm without a swipe at those deadly cushions containing *flame retardants*! He cites another of ACSH's favorite whackos, Arlene Blum, another expert who avoids chemicals whenever she can. Nick says,

Arlene Blum is a chemist whose warnings about carcinogens have proved prophetic. In recent years, she has waged an increasingly successful campaign against modern flame-retardant chemicals because of evidence that they also cause cancer, but she told me that PFASs are even a bigger problem than flame retardants.

Blum's increasingly successful campaign's achievements have escaped us: some states have in fact banned some types of flame retardants; some EU nations have banned other types. Yet, no studies have shown strong evidence of **any** adverse health effects of these lifesaving substances in people, despite the repetitive mantra of toxic, carcinogenic easily found in the green blogosphere echo chamber. [ACSH's publication](#) [9] remains as valid today as when it was first published. These chemicals are present in many of our household items because: **they retard flames and save lives.**

More authoritative evidence against PFAs etc.:

Scientists are already taking precautions and weighing trade-offs in their personal lives. R. Thomas Zoeller, a biology professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, says he now avoids buying nonstick pans. Rainer Lohmann, an oceanographer at the University of Rhode Island, told me that he is replacing carpets in his house with wood floors in part to reduce PFASs. Simona Balan, a senior scientist at the Green Science Policy Institute, avoids microwave popcorn and stain-resistant furniture.

They forgot to mention the aluminum helmets they wear to guard against radioactive transmissions from the Mother Ship. See how this works? Kristof speaks to his select group of anti-chemical experts and then turns around and uses their fears, which comport nicely with his own, to enhance the fear and alarmism.

Then he actually descends from his chemophobia platform to attack the chemical industry for lobbying in support of the upcoming revision to the chemical regulatory law, TSCA (*Toxic Substances Control Act* of 1976). Kristof and his greeniac acolytes think this revised law, backed by large majorities in both parties, is still too lax on chemicals, and he accuses the chemical lobby of working similarly to Big Tobacco and the lead-paint industry of the 20th century. Surely, he implies, any industry that spends money to support the appropriate regulation of its products **must** be in the same pigeonhole as the cigarette makers of old.

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross had this comment: Nick should stick to his main, important topic: attacking

human trafficking and the oppression of the powerless, women and children generally. He should avoid advocacy on topics of which he has no training nor expertise.

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Links

- [1] <http://acsh.org/2013/11/hbos-toxic-hot-seat-toxic-right-seems-addled-kristofs-brain/>
- [2] <http://acsh.org/2013/10/nutty-nick-kristof-flunks-chemistry/>
- [3] <http://acsh.org/2012/10/a-science-lesson-for-nick-kristof-of-the-new-york-times/>
- [4] <http://acsh.org/2012/05/kristof-frightened-couch-maybe/>
- [5] http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/01/business/commonly-used-chemicals-come-under-new-scrutiny.html?via=newsletter&source=CSAMedition&_r=0
- [6] <http://acsh.org/2015/05/chemophobia-week-led-by-the-nytimes-scaring-the-public-about-nothing/>
- [7] <http://acsh.org/2005/03/teflon-and-human-health-do-the-charges-stick/>
- [8] <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/1509944/>
- [9] <http://acsh.org/2006/08/brominated-flame-retardants-a-burning-issue/>