

Press Release from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

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For Immediate Release:

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Bush Administration Decision To Delay Dioxin Report Endangers Public

Local Ag Group Calls For Immediate Steps To Reduce Dioxin Drift Onto Farms

(Minneapolis, MN) – The final draft report from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) currently states that a minimum of 4,000 people in the United States will get cancer from dioxin - at least ten new cases every day. But it appears that the Bush Administration is once again knuckling under to big business – this time, the chemical, poultry and beef industries – by suppressing the final release of the long-awaited EPA report (See below Wash Post Story). According to the EPA report, dioxin will cause an undetermined number of children to be born with birth defects, suppressed immune systems and learning disabilities. Adults will develop diabetes, endometriosis and heart disease because of dioxin exposure.

"First it was carbon dioxide emissions, then arsenic in water, and now it's a blatant attempt to deny the public critical information on an extremely toxic pollutant," said Jackie Hunt Christensen, food safety project director at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. "The Bush Administration seems to be following a doctrine of putting polluters first, and people last."

Dioxin, one of the most toxic substances ever studied, is formed unintentionally when household trash or disposable medical waste that contains chlorine is burned. It also forms during the chemical reactions that occur when chlorine compounds are used to make paper white or when pesticides or polyvinyl chloride (PVC) items are manufactured.

Dioxin enters the food supply when airborne emissions fall onto pastures or grazing land and is eaten by animals. It can also flow into water from pulp mills and accumulate in fish. Since dioxin builds up in fat, people get most of their dioxin exposure from eating foods that contain animal fat.

"Minnesota farmers, from organic to the state's largest operations, should not have dioxin drifting onto their land and into their livestock without their consent," said Jackie Hunt Christensen, food safety project director at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. "The fact that the chemical industry does not WANT to acknowledge the risks to people from dioxin does not make those potential impacts any less real."

The World Health Organization and the National Toxicology Program at the National Institutes of Health have reviewed the research on dioxin and classify it as a known human carcinogen.

EPA has stated that it will not hold policy hearings or take policy actions until the final dioxin reassessment is formally released.

"Even with EPA's regulations, dioxin levels are still too high, at least ten times too high for our food to be safe," explained Christensen. "The only way to truly remove this poison from our food is to put dioxin-polluting industries on a strict diet aimed at getting dioxin out of our air and water. If we start the dioxin-free diet for polluters now, in time, our families will be safe from dioxin food poisoning."

Since 1994, IATP's Food Safety and Health Project has worked with consumers, farmers, ranchers and food producers to get dioxin out of food and out of the environment by calling for an end to practices and policies that allow dioxin emissions.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy has been promoting resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy since 1986. IATP has been involved in efforts to get dioxin out of the food supply since 1994. To learn more about IATP, visit our web site: <https://www.iatp.org/>

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Dioxin Report By EPA On Hold

Industries Oppose Finding of Cancer Link, Urge Delay

By Eric Pianin

Washington Post Staff Writer

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The chemical, beef and poultry industries are waging an intense campaign to delay further an Environmental Protection Agency study showing that consumption of animal fat and dairy products containing traces of dioxin can cause cancer in humans.

EPA scientists and officials say they are confident of the report's findings, which they began circulating last June, and are urging EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman to issue it in final form this summer. But the study, more than a decade in the works, has drawn such intense opposition from industry groups and congressional Republicans that it could be held up for several more years.

By any measure, the economic stakes in the dioxin controversy are high: The EPA's issuance of a final report could result in federal and state regulations costly to chemical manufacturers. It also could provide more adverse publicity for the beef industry at a time of heightened consumer concern about the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Europe.

Industry groups including the American Chemistry Council, the Chlorine Chemistry Council, the Chemical Manufacturers Association, the American Meat Institute and the National Cattlemen's and Beef Association contend the EPA's study is seriously flawed and exaggerates the health risk dioxin poses.

"We are alarmed at any study that reaches conclusions not based on science," said Gary Weber, executive director of regulatory affairs for the cattlemen's association.

Environmentalists who have closely followed the issue for years charge that industry groups and their political allies in government are working to keep the study bottled up indefinitely for political reasons, not scientific ones.

"What we're saying is the chemical industry has had a big influence over the way the EPA makes its decisions," said Stephen Lester of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, which monitors hazardous waste. "They've affected the way the science policy and business of the agency is done."

The Bush administration has challenged several Clinton-era environmental and public health rules and initiatives -- including a tough new standard for arsenic in drinking water -- on the grounds they weren't scientifically sound and would cause economic hardship to industry and local governments.

The politically active chemical, livestock and meatpacking industries contributed \$1,171,000 to Bush's campaign last year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Industry officials are lobbying the administration to postpone indefinitely release of the study until other agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration, can conduct lengthy studies.

EPA officials and spokesmen for the chemical and meat industries dispute environmentalists' charges of a "conspiracy" to block the study's release. They describe the controversy as a dispute over the interpretation of mountains of studies on the health effects of dioxin. Moreover, some scientists were skeptical of the EPA's latest report and predicted it would not withstand scrutiny.

Whitman declined last week to speculate on the fate of the agency draft report, saying only, "We're still looking at that."

Some industry officials concede their primary goal is simply to keep the study of dioxin -- begun during the Reagan administration -- going for as long as possible. David Fischer, managing counsel for the Chlorine Chemistry Council, said his group is pressing the administration to take "an interagency approach" that would allow the FDA, the Agriculture Department and other agencies with jurisdiction over food safety to weigh in.

Fischer said any attempt by Whitman and the EPA to conclude unilaterally that dioxin causes cancer "is a plan doomed for failure."

Dioxin is the airborne byproduct of burning plastics and medical waste containing chlorine. These pollutant compounds infiltrate the food chain through grass and feed, then settle into the fat of livestock and poultry.

The most toxic form of the chemical is known by the acronym TCDD and was more commonly recognized as the contaminant found in Agent Orange, a defoliant used during the Vietnam War. The Air Force has found a "significant and potentially meaningful" relationship between diabetes and bloodstream levels of chemical dioxin in its ongoing study of people who worked with Agent Orange.

Although there is some research of people who were accidentally exposed to the chemical, most data about the potential health effects of dioxin have come from laboratory experiments on animals.

The prevalence of this toxic chemical in the environment has declined by nearly 80 percent since the 1970s because of changing practices in the chemical industry and in waste disposal operations, but the latest EPA study concludes that people who consume even small amounts of dioxin in fatty foods and dairy products face a cancer risk of 1 in 100. They may also develop other problems, such as attention disorder, learning disabilities, susceptibility to infections and liver disorders.

In 1985, the EPA released its first dioxin health assessment, but the agency's findings that the chemical posed one of the most serious threats of cancer in humans of any chemical studied drew strong protests from the chemical industry, which prompted the agency to do a reassessment.

That study, completed in 1994, spurred yet another reassessment. That one culminated in the EPA's issuance last June of its latest findings, showing that the risk of getting cancer from dioxin exposure was 10 times greater than previously thought, ranging from 1 in 1,000 to 1 in 100.

But now there are more hurdles. A subcommittee of an EPA scientific advisory panel composed of outside experts publicly convened in November for two days to review the agency's findings and to make recommendations.

About a third of the 21 panel members were scientists and scholars who have worked as paid consultants to the chemical industry. They included John D. Graham -- long a critic of the notion that dioxin and cancer are linked and founder of the industry-backed Harvard Center for Risk Analysis -- who was recently appointed to a key regulatory review post in the Office of Management and Budget, and Dennis Paustenbach, vice president of Exponent Inc., an engineering and scientific consulting firm. Paustenbach's firm has advised Chemical Land Holdings Inc. and Occidental Chemical Corp. on ways of challenging the EPA's dioxin findings.

An EPA official involved in the preparation of the latest dioxin reassessment said when the advisory panel had completed its meetings, he and other agency officials were under the strong impression that "they had accepted our assumption the data was sufficient to characterize the best studied of the dioxins as a human carcinogen."

Yet on March 13 the panel, headed by Morton Lippmann of the New York University School of Medicine, issued an executive summary of its deliberations that cast serious doubt on many of the EPA's findings -- including the risk assessment of contracting cancer -- and recommended wholesale revisions and rethinking of the study. The industry experts contend that the EPA has overstated the risks posed by normal levels of dioxin in food and questioned the research models used.

Moreover, Lippmann and panel member Genevieve Matanoski had raised strong concerns that EPA scientists had excluded contrary data from two important dioxin studies in reaching their

conclusions, according to Gary Kayajanian, an independent consultant who closely monitored the November meetings.

The Center for Health, Environment and Justice protested that some panel members who assisted in preparing the March 13 report had misrepresented the views of the majority of the advisory panel members. But some panel members and their industry supporters say environmental protesters who attended the November sessions may have intimidated some experts and prompted them to withhold their views until they wrote their report.

"I think a lot of us -- me included -- believe the data in the current analysis is fairly weak that risks of cancer [from normal doses of dioxin] are equal to 1 in 1,000," Paustenbach said. "When there's a number of vocal [protesters] who clearly have strong views, there may be a tendency [by panel members] to be cautious and to not antagonize the crowd, if you will."

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