

Report finds contaminants in baby products

March 18 2009, By Maren Wright

Protecting J.J., the 4-month-old son of Shawna Bader-Blau, is time-consuming, what with checking labels, reading safety information, buying chemical-free baby wipes and finding phthalate-free baby bottles.

"There are so many recalls, they just make you scared of everything," said Bader-Blau.

On March 12, the Silver Spring, Md., mom attended the release of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics' report on children's bath products to see if she has anything new to worry about. The group's report showed that 61 percent of baby products tested were contaminated with the cancer-causing chemicals formaldehyde and 1,4-dioxane.

"It's maddening that these chemicals aren't regulated," Bader-Blau said.

Stacy Malkan, campaign cofounder, said these chemicals aren't disclosed on product labels because they are exempt from the Food and Drug Administration's labeling laws.

The FDA has been monitoring 1,4-dioxane since the 1970s. It is a [byproduct](#) of the [manufacturing process](#), but methods such as vacuum stripping, where ingredients are heated and the volatile 1,4-dioxane is lifted off, minimize the presence of the chemical.

John Bailey, chief scientist of the [Personal Care](#) Product Council and past director of the FDA's Office of Cosmetics, said the reported levels

of the byproduct in baby items are not hazardous. His organization represents manufacturers of cosmetic and personal care products.

"The companies take steps to get it down as low as possible, and I think the levels we're seeing here represent the steps they have taken to keep them low."

FDA spokeswoman Stephanie Kwisneck concurs.

"At this time we have no evidence that the levels of 1,4 dioxane at its current levels are harmful. We are constantly monitoring science and if new data or new information emerges we will advise the public accordingly," Kwisneck said.

Formaldehyde is an anti-microbial additive. It's not FDA-regulated, Kwisneck said, because it has not been determined to be harmful under the intended use.

The European Union does regulate formaldehyde, Bailey said, allowing cosmetics to contain 0.2 percent formaldehyde, or 2,000 ppm. The highest level found in the campaign's testing was 610 ppm in the product Baby Magic "Soft Baby Scent" Baby Lotion, well under the EU's allowance.

"This is no cause for concern," said council spokeswoman Kathleen Dezio, calling the publicity over these trace chemicals "ridiculous."

Director of the Center for Environmental Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, Devra Lee Davis, disagrees.

"When the FDA law was passed it was an anti-poison act and the focus was to get rid of poisons," Davis said. "We are dealing now with chronic issues _ asthma, autism, cancer - where trace chemicals make a

difference over time."

As proof, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics refers to an unofficial report by a technical staff member of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission who wrote, "the presence of 1,4-dioxane, even as a trace contaminant, is cause for concern."

Consumers don't want to guess whether products are safe, Davis said, so even the presence of low levels of carcinogens should be labeled.

"The important message is that none of these contaminants are required to be on the label," said Robyn Gilden, of the University of Maryland School of Nursing Environmental Health Education Center.

Gilden, both as a mother and a nurse, wants to see new regulations by the FDA to require label lists of all personal care product ingredients.

"On their own, the industry could step up," Gilden said. "But a lot of times they won't."

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