

Expert panel: Carcinogenic chemicals in environment threaten Americans

May 7 2010, by Lin Edwards



The hazard symbol for carcinogenic chemicals in the Globally Harmonized System. Image via Wikipedia.

(PhysOrg.com) -- An expert panel in the U.S. has warned President Obama Americans face "grievous harm" from a bombardment of largely unregulated and often carcinogenic chemicals in their food, air and water, both at work and in the home, and has urged the president to adopt a new national strategy to focus on the threat.

The panel, known as the "President's [Cancer Panel](#)," claims the often-quoted figure of only five percent of cancers being caused by [environmental chemicals](#) and [pollution](#), and the rest caused by factors such as diet and smoking, is grossly underestimated. The panel did not offer a new estimate, however.

The panel's report, released on May 6, said there was a "growing body of evidence" that linked exposure to chemicals, [radiation](#) and pollutants in the environment to cancer, with children being especially at risk because they are smaller and still growing. It pointed out U.S. Federal laws in the area are weak, with regulation split between too many agencies, and that research funding and enforcement in the country are inadequate.

The 200-page report said rates of some cancers in children were rising inexplicably, and recent research had found umbilical cord blood contained industrial chemicals, which meant children were being "bombarded" with exposure to a combination of [dangerous chemicals](#) before they were born. The report also noted that the impact of chemicals on fetuses, babies and young children is not known.

The report also criticized government standards for work place exposure to [industrial chemicals](#), saying they were outdated, and the U.S. needs a complete overhaul of laws pertaining to these chemicals. The system in place at present requires the government to prove beyond doubt a chemical is unsafe rather than requiring the manufacturer to prove the chemical is safe.

The standards of proof are so high the U.S. government has been unable to prove [asbestos](#) is unsafe, despite the fact it has been banned in many other countries because it is recognized as a carcinogen. Of the roughly 80,000 chemicals used commercially in the U.S. only about 200 have been assessed for safety by Federal regulators. The panel urged the president to use his power to remove from the environment toxins that "needlessly increase health care costs," devastate lives, and cripple the country's productivity.

Around 1.5 million Americans were diagnosed with cancer in 2009, and over half a million died from cancer the same year, making it the biggest killer of Americans after heart disease.

The members of the panel were Margaret Kripke, Emeritus Professor of the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and Professor of Surgery, Dr. LaSalle Leffall, from the Howard University College of Medicine in Washington D.C. They were originally appointed by President George W. Bush.

More information: deainfo.nci.nih.gov/advisory/pcp/pcp.htm

© 2010 PhysOrg.com

Citation: Expert panel: Carcinogenic chemicals in environment threaten Americans (2010, May 7) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-05-expert-panel-carcinogenic-chemicals-environment.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.