

From: Bruce Jarnot <jarnotb@api.org>
Sent: Friday, April 29, 2005 2:57 PM (GMT)
To: Bruce Jarnot <jarnotb@api.org>
Subject: FYI... Houston Chronicle & Associated Press articles on SHS
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FYI... two articles (one below, one attached)

Petroleum Industry Funds New Benzene Study

By WENDY BENJAMINSON Associated Press Writer=

HOUSTON (AP) An oil industry trade group is challenging a U.S. government study about the dangers of benzene exposure by financing a study of its own.

The \$27 million study undertaken by the American Petroleum Institute aims to give the industry leverage against any consequences of a study by the National Cancer Institute, a division of the National Institutes of Health, that suggests occupational exposure to benzene is more dangerous than previously believed.

The industry fears the possibility of tighter regulations or lawsuits from cancer patients, according to documents found in boxes of evidence in an unrelated lawsuit.

Benzene, long known to be carcinogenic, is a chemical used throughout the petrochemical industry. It is a widespread contaminant in the air and groundwater and comes from industrial sources, cigarette smoke, gasoline and automobile emissions.

While it is generally accepted that benzene causes leukemia, scientists argue about the level of risk at low exposures as well as the other blood-related diseases that could be contracted from benzene.

The U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Administration has a permissible exposure limit for people who work with benzene of 1 part per million in an 8-hour workday.

The documents obtained by The Associated Press were found in boxes of evidence that Marathon Oil Co. provided to Houston lawyer Lance Lubel, who is suing Dow Chemical Co. on behalf of a worker who now has leukemia.

Lubel deposed Dr. Gerhard Raabe, who led the petroleum institute's Health and Products Stewardship Committee. Raabe was involved in raising money from oil companies for the API study, which began in 2001 and is expected to be completed in 2007.

In the deposition, Raabe said he was concerned about the soundness of the cancer institute's study and that "folks like you," meaning plaintiffs' lawyers would continue to believe benzene had health effects for which he said there was little scientific evidence.

The 1997 National Cancer Institute study of workers in Shanghai, China, where benzene exposure is far higher than in the United States, concluded that workers with 10 or more years of benzene exposure had a risk of developing non-Hodgkins' lymphoma more than four times that of the general population.

Another NCI study of benzene on Chinese workers, published in the journal Science in December, concluded that "these data provide evidence that benzene causes hematologic effects (diseases of the blood) at or below 1 ppm, particularly among susceptible subpopulations."

Acceptable levels of benzene exposure have been debated since the late 1940s, but for almost 20 years, 1 ppm has been considered the acceptable exposure for workers.

OSHA spokesman Albert Belsky said the agency and the National Cancer Institute agreed that the changes in white blood

cell counts among Chinese workers exposed to 1 ppm or less need to be studied further before OSHA would consider changing the standard.

The first NCI study prompted the American Petroleum Institute to compile a "consortium" of petrochemical companies to pay more than \$27 million to "establish and fund a research program on the lymphohematopoietic health risks from occupational exposure to benzene" in Shanghai, according to the agreement signed by the industry study participants.

A Powerpoint presentation used to raise money from the industry included a section describing "the significant issues of concern to global petroleum industry that the research would affect." Those issues included possible changes to the way gasoline is made, additional emissions controls and litigation.

Lorraine Twerdok, the American Petroleum Institute's manager of health sciences, e-mailed a statement in response to questions from The AP that said: "The Shanghai Health Study is being conducted to gain a better understanding of the relationship between benzene exposure and potential cancer risk to protect industry workers and customers."

Twerdok's statement also described the scientific independence of the study from the institute or member companies.

But a draft of the committee structure for API's China Benzene Research Consortium shows that a Business Oversight Committee, made up of one member from each sponsor company, would have final approval over protocol decisions made by the Scientific Review Board.

The companies funding the study are BP PLC, ChevronTexaco Corp., ConocoPhillips Co., ExxonMobil Corp., and Shell Chemical, a unit of Royal Dutch/Shell Group of Cos.

Lubel said the documents provide vital insight to what the oil companies will do to protect themselves.

"The API's involvement in these benzene studies raises the same concerns of the fox in the henhouse as we've seen with the tobacco and pharmaceutical industries," Lubel said.

On the Net:

American Petroleum Institute: www.api.org

National Cancer Institute: www.nci.nih.gov

(PROFILE (CO:BP PLC; TS:BP; IG:ENE;) (CO:ChevronTexaco Corp; TS:CVX; IG:ENE;) (CO:ConocoPhillips; TS:COP; IG:ENE;) (COUNTRY:China; ISOCOUNTRY3:CHN; UNTOP:142; UN2ND:030; APGROUP:Asia;) (COUNTRY:Netherlands; ISOCOUNTRY3:NLD; UNTOP:150; UN2ND:155; APGROUP:Europe;) (COUNTRY:United States; ISOCOUNTRY3:USA; UNTOP:021; APGROUP:NorthAmerica;))

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