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■ C O N G R E S S R E P O R T S**EPIDEMY OF ACUTE RESPIRATORY ILLNESS LINKED TO USE OF WATER-PROOFING TEXTILE AND LEATHER SPRAY****Kupferschmidt H. Swiss Toxicological Information Centre, and Divison of Clinical Pharmacology and Toxicology, University Hospital, Zurich, Switzerland.**

Background: Acute respiratory symptoms after use of aerosol leather conditioner or textile waterproofing sprays have been reported in the literature on several occasions. These cases occurred after the sprays had been reformulated. The pneumotoxic effects have been attributed in part to the waterproofing fluorocarbon polymers and the solvents, with the mist particle size being the critical parameter for toxicity.

Case series: Our poison center has become aware of a sharp increase of cases of respiratory symptoms after use of two recently reformulated textile and leather sprays during the last few weeks of 2002. Whereas the average annual number of similar cases was 5 to 10 during the last 7 years, it totalled to 45 in 2002 and to 108 during the first three months of 2003. Symptoms involved cough, shortness of breath, inability to smoke, and tachycardia. Some of the patients were admitted to hospital with fever, malaise, decreased arterial oxygen saturation, and pulmonary infiltrates. All patients recovered, although a few stayed in the hospital for up to 8 days. The sprays involved were withdrawn from the market. The particular reasons for this overt toxicity are not yet clear and are currently under investigation.

Conclusion: This observations and the previously reported epidemics demonstrate that reformulation of aerosol waterproofing sprays may lead to a marked increase of respiratory toxicity, most probably due to a decrease in mist particle size. Poison centers are particularly able to detect such effects at an early stage and warn the population and the authorities. We suggest that determination of particle size in such sprays becomes a mandatory feature in product regulation.

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