El Paso Herald-Post
EL PASO, TEXAS
D. 47,450

JAN 15 1976



ANN McFEATTERS

The pressure is on

Scripps-Howard Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — With 60 to 90 per cent of all human cancer now attributed to environmental factors such as household chemicals and food additives, Congress and federal agencies today are under strong pressure to "do something."

A flood of studies in recent weeks indicate health risks from drinking water, food, drugs, the workplace, the home, the office.

In a deluge of regulatory actions taken against toxic substances, government reports admit most Americans, from babies to the elderly, are regularly exposed to cancer-causing substances called carcinogens.

THE PUBLIC suddenly is acutely aware of strange-sounding cancer-causing substances such as Red No. 2 food dye, nitrosamines in meat, PCBS in drinking water, DES in animal feed. There also are harmful substances in the ceiling of some office buildings, the threat that fluorocarbons in aerosols will cause more skin cancer, the health damage that pesticides such as kepone have done to workers, the lethal threat of vinyl chloride gas.

Cancer researchers say that one in four Americans now living will develop some form of cancer and one in five Americans will die from it. They also say that people in highly industrialized areas such as the Northeast are much more likely to develop cancer than those in other areas.

The government reported Monday that national death rates are declining for childbirth and heart disease but rising for cancer. The first massive study of the nation's health found the cancer rate is up almost four per cent in the last six years.

AT A CONFERENCE on Capitol Hill this week to review the growing threat of environmentally caused cancer, a dozen national experts from industry, the federal government, the National Cancer Institute and academic research concluded there is grave need for some form of law to control the proliferation of toxic substances.

Bills to require some form of premarket clearance by the government of new chemicals are pending in both the House and Senate.

Backers of such legislation hope that for the first time it has a chance of passing this year because of increased alarm resulting from the recent studies. But it's clear that these key issues have not been settled:

—Just because a substance causes cancer in animals, should the substance be restricted for human use as the law now requires?

—How do regulators resolve the fact that what is considered a safe amount for suspect substances this year will no longer be thought safe next year because of new ways of measuring?

—Who should decide when the benefits to society of a new chemical outweigh the risks for human health it may pose, and how should it be decided?

—How will a decision be made on such matters of policy as: Should government be spending millions of dollars a year to subsidize the tobacco industry and additional millions to develop a less hazardous cigaret? Should millions of women be denied the relief for symptoms of menopause by taking estrogens which may cause cancer?

MONS 032874