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News

Benzene

Former OSHA Official Says API-Funded Study Has Potential for Bias in Findings

An American Petroleum Institute-funded study on benzene exposure currently under way in Shanghai, China, has the potential for bias, a former Occupational Safety and Health Administration official claims in a professional journal article.

Peter Infante, who worked at OSHA for 24 years and served from 1983-2002 as director of the Office of Standards Review, said that the study conclusions already have been developed "by those involved in the solicitation of funding for the research." He claims that API has collected \$27 million from its member companies to fund the Shanghai study.

The article, "The Past Suppression of Industry Knowledge of the Toxicity of Benzene to Humans and Potential Bias in Future Benzene Research," appears in the July-September issue of the *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*. Infante is currently an adjunct professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

"In an effort to solicit money for the study, prior to its commencement, the API presented to its member companies what appears to have been a PowerPoint presentation of the 'expected results' of the 'Shanghai study,'" Infante said in the article.

According to Infante, the presentation indicated that the study results could affect issues of "global financial concern," including requirements to reformulate gasoline, clean up petroleum-contaminated soil and water, reduce benzene exposures from marketing facilities, and affect litigation costs for those who contract leukemia and other hematopoietic diseases.

The presentation was sent to a manager at Marathon Oil Corp., the article said.

Infante said the findings of the Shanghai study are expected to:

- provide strong scientific support for the lack of a risk of leukemia or other hematological disease to general populations at current ambient benzene concentrations;
- establish that the adherence to current occupational exposure limits (in the range of 1 to 5 parts per million) does not create a significant risk to workers; and
- refute the allegation that non-Hodgkin's lymphoma can be induced by benzene.

Infante told BNA Aug. 14 that he has the documentation to back up his statements that the study results may be predetermined.

"If the findings of the study turn out to be similar to those expressed prior to the commencement of the study, they will be difficult to accept unless a research organization that does not have an invested interest in the outcome is given the responsibility to complete the study," the article said.

Infante said that a third-party should conduct the Shanghai benzene study. He would like to see API contact others like the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the National Cancer Institute and solicit their involvement in the study. "To do otherwise may result in the findings having little scientific