

Guard public; test chemicals before release

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By CARL CRANOR

Scientific research into the developmental basis of disease is revealing that some ailments can be predisposed or triggered in utero or post-natally, before a child is fully adult. We are all contaminated and quite permeable to industrial compounds, even children developing in utero and pregnant women.

Babies are born with chemical contaminations. Some of them are hazardous. Yet the laws that aim to protect us simply cannot do the job because the vast percentage of industrial chemicals enter commerce without any toxicity data.

study the risks

As David Danelski accurately reported in The Press-Enterprise ("[UC Riverside](#): 'We are guinea pigs,' professor says," Feb. 1), my book -- "Legally Poisoned: How the Law Puts Us at Risk from Toxicants" -- argues for the substantive science and risk assessments needed to protect our health. This needs to occur before we and our children are exposed, not afterward, turning citizens into guinea pigs.

Molecules can be harmful, but not all are, and concentrations are important in influencing toxic responses in our bodies.

[Cancer](#) is not the only disease endpoint of concern, but it is one. Cancers can be and have been caused by in utero or childhood exposures. Some current research continues to find this.

More important, scientists are revealing other diseases or dysfunctions we should be concerned about.

Neurological problems, including [autism](#), learning dysfunctions, behavioral problems, and Parkinson's disease are the focus of considerable research. The developing brain has one chance to develop properly, with few or no opportunities to correct mistakes caused by toxic substances.

It also appears that the immune system has only one chance to develop properly, to have the right balance of disease-fighting cells. If it does not, children may experience more childhood immuno-deficiencies, and some of these foreshadow a lifetime pattern of poorly functioning immune responses, according to the researchers.

Reproductive health for both males and females is also of considerable concern. Pesticides, phthalates and some other substances can inhibit or damage male reproductive tracts and their sperm. Leading researchers of the immune, neurological and reproductive systems call for premarket toxicity testing of industrial chemicals in order to catch and prevent as many of these problems as researchers can before citizens are exposed.

End the delays

Pesticides and pharmaceuticals are tested for toxicity and public health agencies review the data before commercialization to try to prevent citizens from becoming guinea pigs. The remaining industrial chemicals should be tested appropriately before entering the market as well.

Some advocates -- usually companies that create and use industrial chemicals -- and perhaps Jon Entine, who criticized my book in an op-ed recently, seem to think the current system of protecting the public health is fine.

Permit the majority of industrial chemicals into commerce without any legally required toxicity data, and if people are harmed later, react to that.

A typical scenario would be to conduct a time-consuming, science-intensive, expensive risk assessment paid for by taxpayers to determine how many people are harmed at what exposure levels, as well as the costs and benefits of regulating the substance. Typically, affected companies urge more science, further delaying improved protections of the public health.

While such assessments occur, more people and their children will be at risk. "Legally Poisoned" utilizes the best science on how diseases and dysfunctions can originate in the womb or during development, points out that current laws inadequately protect our children, and proposes alternatives to improve health protections from toxic chemicals.

It assumes the continued existence of the chemical industry. It is not chemophobic. The law permits risky toxic substances to contaminate us and our children; the law can be changed for better health protections. This should be done.

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