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News Release - Teflon chemical linked to increased cholesterol levels

New data increases the level of concern over exposure

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WASHINGTON - A chemical used to make Teflon, food wrappers and dozens of other consumer products is linked to higher levels of cholesterol, according to the latest findings of a multi-year study of 69,000 West Virginians and Ohioans whose drinking water was contaminated by a DuPont manufacturing plant in Washington, W. Va, along the Ohio River.

Perfluorooctanoic acid, commonly known as PFOA or C8, is one of a class of perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been detected in the urine and blood of nearly all Americans tested in bioassays.

"This latest report is just more evidence that this Teflon chemical is far more toxic than originally thought and is dangerous at levels found in the population at large," said Environmental Working Group (EWG) Senior Scientist Olga Naidenko. "The only way to protect future generations of Americans is to change fundamentally the way this country regulates toxic chemicals. We must require industry to prove chemicals are safe before they're used in consumer products."

A team from West Virginia University is leading the most extensive study of its kind, funded by DuPont's \$107.5 million settlement in a lawsuit over PFOA releases from its West Virginia plant.

A panel of internationally recognized scientists, known as the C8 science panel and charged with overseeing the WVU study, reported last week that levels of total cholesterol, low density lipoprotein (LDL, often called "bad" cholesterol) and triglycerides were all greater in people with high exposures to PFOA.

But, the panel said, those people did not benefit from a corresponding increase in high density lipoprotein (HDL, known as "good" cholesterol). Increased total and low LDL cholesterol levels can lead to heart disease and other chronic ailments later in life.

The panel cautioned that the study did not prove that PFC exposure caused bad cholesterol levels to spike because there were no cholesterol readings for people participating in the study prior to their exposure to PFOA. It added that studies now underway may answer the question of a cause-and-effect relationship between PFOA and cholesterol.

The data produced so far by the unprecedented study is cause for serious concern. The initial results, made public last May, indicated that exposure to PFOA may harm the immune system, liver and thyroid and cause higher cholesterol in children. WVU findings buttress occupational health studies linking industrial exposure to PFOA to elevated cholesterol levels and higher risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer.

The chemical industry has agreed to remove PFOA from the market by 2015, but other PFCs will remain available, and the chemical industry is constantly introducing new members of the PFC family.

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EWG is a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, DC that uses the power of information to protect human health and the environment.

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