

**Comments of Peter Lurie, MD, MPH
Public Citizen's Health Research Group
before the
National Toxicology Program Public Meeting on
the Report on Carcinogens Review Process
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Thank you for the opportunity to offer our perspectives on the review process and need for the National Toxicology Program's (NTP's) Report on Carcinogens. I want to start off with two historical notes. First, I would like to acknowledge the unfortunate death of Dr. David Rall, the former Head of NTP and a tireless advocate for reducing consumer exposure to environmental and occupational chemicals. Dr. Rall was someone who understood the importance of animal carcinogenicity data. I think there would be no greater tribute to the work he did during his career for the Report on Carcinogens to continue to come out in an expeditious fashion.

The second historical note is that in preparing for my talk here, I took the occasion to review some of the documents related to the 1995 reconsideration of the listing criteria for the Report on Carcinogens. I compared the 1995 industry comments to the recent letter from industry complaining about the problems they see in the process for listing in the Report on Carcinogens. What struck me was how numbingly repetitive the arguments offered in the recent letter were to those offered in 1995. Here are some of the themes sounded in the 1995 documents; they have either already been mentioned in the industry's recent letter or are likely to be reiterated by the industry today:

- Insisting upon a higher threshold for listing a substance in the Report on Carcinogens.
- Emphasizing the importance of risk assessment (to de-emphasize a chemical's risk).
- Questioning the usefulness of animal evidence.
- Using "mechanism of action" arguments to justify not listing a chemical in the Report on Carcinogens or delisting it. The industry always raises this issue in a one-sided fashion -- we do not hear the industry proposing using mechanism of action data to justify listing a chemical as a carcinogen.

- Using non-peer-reviewed data to justify delisting or not listing chemicals.
- Using delaying tactics. How ironic these complaints about process are, coming from industries that are usually complaining about red tape. We now confront the unusual spectacle of arguments for transparency being made by industries which frequently invoke trade secret exemptions to prevent consumers from getting important information about drugs and toxic chemicals.

Unfortunately, these delaying tactics have all-too-often yielded results. Frequently the NTP has missed the statutory deadlines for issuing the Report on Carcinogens. One reason is that very often the Report gets tied up in lawsuits from the industry. First, there was dichlorobenzene, then fibrous glass and now dioxin.

Why is the Report on Carcinogens so critical? First, it can form the basis for regulation by the Food and Drug Administration, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Agriculture Department and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Of course, many of the industry's objections to the Report on Carcinogens can be explained by its efforts to avoid regulation.

Second, many consumers labor under the misconception that "Everything gives you cancer." Actually, it is a very limited number of compounds that cause cancer, limited enough to end up in the rather small Report on Carcinogens. The Report can thus serve to reassure the public.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of process. There are at least three opportunities for public input into the content of the Report on Carcinogens. In addition, one can write a letter to the NTP at any time. The least important of the problems faced by the NTP has been the lack of opportunity for industry to provide input. In fact, it is precisely these manifold opportunities for input that the industry has frequently exploited to delay the Report on Carcinogens. When these tactics have failed, the industry has all-too-often resorted to the courts.

The industry criticisms are really complaints about outcome masquerading as complaints about process. The strength of the industry's opposition to these well-researched Reports is the best evidence for their usefulness.