



Nov. 27, 2005

**Formaldehyde Council, Inc., Statement on
U.S. EPA Formaldehyde Review**

The Formaldehyde Council, Inc. (FCI) is encouraged that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) intends to wait until it has the benefit of enhanced scientific data from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) before updating its carcinogen classification for formaldehyde under its Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) program. EPA currently classifies formaldehyde as “probably carcinogenic to humans” under the IRIS program.

When in 2004 the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) – part of the World Health Organization -- classified formaldehyde as “carcinogen to humans,” it relied heavily on an NCI study indicating that formaldehyde causes nasopharyngeal cancer (NPC) in humans and is associated with leukemia. NPC is a very rare form of cancer that occurs where the rear of the nasal cavity meets the throat.

That research involved more than 25,000 workers at 10 plants where occupational exposure to formaldehyde occurred in the 1940s through 1960s. Of 10 total cases of NPC, six came from one plant and the other four cases were distributed randomly over the other nine plants. This situation is not the expected pattern from an occupational carcinogen, but rather suggests causes other than formaldehyde exposure at the single plant where most of the cases were observed.

The FCI commissioned an independent review of the NCI study linking formaldehyde to NPC and the companion study associating formaldehyde with leukemia (both of which were published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*). The review by biostatisticians Gary Marsh, Ph.D., and Ada Youk, Ph.D., of the University of Pittsburgh indicated that the findings pertaining to both NPC and leukemia were highly questionable. The Marsh/Youk research has been published in the *Journal of Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology*.

The NCI update will add eight years of already-available data to the evidence. This update should help confirm or refute whether exposure to formaldehyde is actually associated with an increased risk of cancer, and thereby provide a firmer basis for the EPA IRIS evaluation.

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Formaldehyde is one of the most valuable and most studied chemicals in commerce. It is used to make thousands of products, including medicines, vaccines, cosmetics, glues, crop-enhancement chemicals, carpets, drapes, flooring, dyes, fiberboard, floor polishes, household cleaners, paints, paper, plywood, particle board, insulation, and permanent-press clothing. Formaldehyde has excellent disinfecting properties, as well. Nearly 600 animal and human studies have examined the safety of formaldehyde.

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