

May 9, 2006

**Formaldehyde Council, Inc., Statement on  
Hauptmann Findings Concerning Formaldehyde and Cancer**

The Formaldehyde Council, Inc. (FCI) is encouraged that the National Cancer Institute (NCI) is updating its study that produced questionable findings concerning formaldehyde and cancer. On Oct. 12, 2004, NCI Director Andrew C. von Eschenbach, M.D., announced that the NCI would extend the mortality follow-up of the study by Hauptmann and colleagues<sup>1</sup>. The decision came after a subsequent reanalysis<sup>2</sup> of the Hauptmann study and several other published references cast doubt on the findings.

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, which indicated that formaldehyde causes nasopharyngeal cancer (NPC) in humans, and on a companion study that associated formaldehyde with leukemia. NPC is a very rare form of cancer that occurs where the rear of the nasal cavity meets the throat.

Hauptmann’s research involved 25,000-plus workers at 10 plants where occupational exposure to formaldehyde occurred in the 1940s through 1960s. The subsequent independent review found that of the eight total cases of NPC among workers who had been exposed to formaldehyde, six came from one plant and the other two exposed cases were distributed among nine plants. Clearly, 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 independent review, which was commissioned by the FCI, also indicated that the findings pertaining to leukemia were highly questionable.

By updating the NCI study, additional cancer deaths occurring within the study group over the years 1995-2002 are expected to nearly double the number of deaths and expected cancers in the study, thereby making risk estimates more precise. Until this update is completed, yielding a more definitive assessment of the risks of NPC, the study by Hauptmann and colleagues at NCI should not be viewed as a sound basis for assessing risk from formaldehyde exposure.

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<sup>1</sup> Hauptmann, M., Lubine, J.J., Stewart, P.A., Hayes, R.B., Blair, A. (2004) Mortality from solid cancers among workers in formaldehyde industries. *Am J Epidemiol* 159(12):1117-30

<sup>2</sup> Marsh, G.M., Youk, A.O. (2005) Reevaluation of mortality risks from nasopharyngeal cancer in the formaldehyde cohort study of the National Cancer Institute. *Regul toxicol Pharmacol* 42(3):275-83

Because studies such as those by Hauptmann and colleagues are complicated, there are legitimate grounds for differences of opinion on how the data are interpreted. In addition to the reanalysis that cast doubt on the findings, the Hauptmann study generated a number of letters to the editor of scientific journals suggesting that the reported findings of NPC were spurious.

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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