Formaldehyde Council

July 23, 2007

**Formaldehyde Council, Inc., Statement**
**in response to**
**House Committee on Oversight and Reform Hearing on**
**Formaldehyde in FEMA Trailers**

While we are deeply sympathetic to the plight of Hurricane Katrina evacuees who currently reside in travel trailers provided as temporary housing by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), we take issue with statements that have been made about the safe levels of formaldehyde exposure, as well as the relative safety of what is, in fact, an ever-present and beneficial compound.

Exposure to formaldehyde at high levels can cause irritation, but for most people, the irritation is temporary and reversible. Sensory irritation, particularly eye irritation, is typically the result of airborne concentrations of formaldehyde beginning at 0.3 to 0.5 parts per million (ppm). An expert panel review of over 150 published studies found that eye irritation does not become significant until around 1.0 ppm. The expert panel found that a level of 0.3 ppm would protect against nearly all irritation. In a normal indoor environment, formaldehyde exposure levels would typically be below 0.1 ppm. The Formaldehyde Council will be reaching out to officials at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to offer scientific expertise as the CDC begins its study of formaldehyde levels associated with FEMA trailers.

A 2004 decision by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) to classify formaldehyde as a human carcinogen was based primarily on the findings of a National Cancer Institute (NCI) study of workers indicating that formaldehyde causes an extremely rare form of cancer, cancer of the nasopharynx. This finding was concentrated in only one of 10 plants studied by NCI. An independent study of this one plant by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh has revealed that causes other than formaldehyde exposure may account for the nasal cancer finding in the NCI study. These findings are published in the August 2007 issue of the Journal of Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology [40 (2007) 308-319].

Formaldehyde is a natural part of our world and a critical ingredient in many beneficial products used in our everyday life. As one of the most extensively studied products on the market today, formaldehyde's safety is well understood. Typical exposure levels to formaldehyde found in the normal living environment do not pose a threat to people or the environment. Because of regulations and advances in science and technology, resulting in the availability of cost-effective, low-emitting products, formaldehyde exposure levels have been dramatically reduced over the past 30 years and now approach normal ambient background levels.

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