

Dr. Samuel Epstein

Prof. emeritus, Occupational & Environmental Medicine, U of Illinois.

EXTERNALITIES > Household Carcinogens

Mainstream cosmetics and toiletries contain 60 or so different chemical carcinogens and by carcinogens, we mean cancer causing agents the majority of which have been identified in well designed valid animal tests which were regarded by the scientific community as a strong indicator of human risk and some of the other cancer causing agents, we have actually human evidence for them.

... You show this list of twenty different ingredients to the average chemist or even toxicologist and they will probably will not be able to tell you which of these are cancer causing agents, for the following reasons.

While some of them are frank cancer causing agents, others themselves are not cancer causing agents, themselves, but they breakdown in the bottle or the tube, or the skin, to release a cancer causing agents, chemicals like formaldehyde or others are not cancer causing themselves but they will interact with other ingredients to form cancer-causing agents. Or others are not cancer causing ingredients themselves, but they're contaminated by cancer causing ingredients. So the average woman could use up to about 20 different cosmetics and toiletry products a day and these could contain a dozen or so different chemical carcinogens and they are applied to large surface areas of the skin, their absorption is increased by the detergents and the surfactants present in them, so from birth till death, cause infants, lotions are also used for infants, almost the entire US population is exposed to avoidable causes of cancer and cancer causing ingredients in daily products.

So there's no warning whatsoever, so how exactly, what words one uses to describe this FDA practice whether you want to call it reckless, whether you want to call it harsher terms, is a matter for your perspective.

CORPORATIONS AND GOVERNMENT > This Cancer Establishment

Now the cancer establishment is comprised of the National Cancer Institute whose budget is now 4.6 billion dollars a year which is roughly 2,000% increase in its budget since President Nixon declared the war on against cancer in 1971 when he was told, "give us more money, make the National Cancer Institute an independent institute within the National Institutes of Health and we'll conquer cancer in your lifetime, or in the next 6 years or so." So you have the National Cancer Institute with its 4.6 billion dollar budget requesting 5.2, actually I think the figure was 4.2 billion requesting 5.6 billion for the next year. You've got the

American Cancer Society, the world's largest, nonreligious charity with a budget with about 800 million.

First of all the Cancer establishment as a generalization, is fixated on damage control, by damage control I mean screening, diagnosis, treatment and also some molecular biology, with virtual indifference and minimal priority to prevention, which in the case of the American Cancer Society extends to actual hostility. Actual hostility to prevention. Now the reasons for this are complex. But let me try to express them as simply as I can. Within the National Cancer Institute, the reason for the indifference to the prevention, is largely because of a mindset, the main leadership comes from scientists who have been involved, surgeons, radiologists, oncologists, and as such this is their main shtick. That's really what they're interested in, they're not interested, they don't understand prevention, they're not interested in it and they say if anybody needs to regulate, its got nothing to do with us, the regulatory agency should handle that. But the regulatory agencies don't have the science, they depend on the National Cancer Institute for the science, but the American Cancer Society is basically the same mindset, but in addition to the mindset there are strong conflicts of interests with many industries.

So many past presidents of the American Cancer society have been radiologists they have close ties with the medi-cancer drug industries, and close holdings in some instances with cancer drug industries, also close relationships with the entertainment industry and a wide range of other industries, so their network connections with corporations, far and wide, all of which I have documented and incidentally received an investigative journalist prize called Project Censored Award, for documenting these relationships of American Cancer Society and industry, and in fact the Chronicle of Philanthropy this nations leading charity watchdog, has stated that the American Cancer Society is more interested in accumulating wealth than saving lives.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE > Curing The Cancer Epidemic

What do we need to do to turn this whole situation round? The answers are really very simple, extremely simple and they are more in the realm of public policy than they are of science. The first is basically the precautionary principle. Do not allow any corporation to introduce into commerce any product, process or technology which has not been thoroughly and independently tested and independently validated. Insist that this evidence be validated by non-governmental organizations and insist on the principle of risk avoidance and risk prevention rather than accepting risk and attempting to so-called to manage risk. That's the first. That's an absolute ban on any new or poorly tested or untested technologies.

The next is Toxics Use Reduction. By that I mean, phase out the current use of toxic and cancer causing chemicals. Now is this pie in the sky? Not at all, not one

bit. In 1988 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts working, the ground having been prepared by a coalition of people from the university of lower Massachusetts, environmental groups and some responsible industry in Massachusetts, passed a Toxic Use Reduction Act, which stated that - we will in collaboration with engineers and industrial hygienists develop methodologies for phasing out toxics and they have been extraordinarily successful in regard to the reduction of hazardous waste disposal and with relation to phasing out the use of chlorinated organic solvents.

And this can be bolstered by a series of tax incentives, and disincentives. You offer the incentives to the companies who are phasing out hazardous products, and disincentives to those who know about the hazardous products, but refuse to act on this.

... In this country and all great democracies, we believe every citizen has the right to have access to all information except validated trade secrets, which there are very, very few, and defence and security. However US and German, and citizens all over democracies, are denied the right to have information which lies buried in Government and industry files or relatively inaccessible in the scientific literature. Once you give this information to the public, you have a grassroots revolution demanding safety. Dying from cancer ain't a very pleasant business and seeing your wife or your children dying from cancer, isn't a very pleasant business. Given that opportunity, I'll give you a hundred to one, you'll see an international grassroots, democratic revolution in which people demand the right to know. That's a winner, nobody can argue against that.

The next is transparency of decision making. So much decision making, is made behind closed door, as it was with Enron, without any safeguards. The FAOWHO committees in Geneva, that's the Food and Agricultural Organization World Health Organization, they meet in private, they have industry consultants, no representatives of nongovernmental organizations. So balanced decision making and transparent decision making in the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society, lead committees, there are no representatives of individuals and scientists who are knowledgeable and vocal in their demand for prevention.

Members of corporations that knowingly refuse to divulge information on hazards of their products or processes, or their managements or their R & D staff, should be subject to criminal penalties, and both Senator Kennedy in 1978 and Congressman Conyers attempted to pass white collar crime legislation, and I testified in Conyers legislation and provided a detailed listing of companies, major corporations with examples of how they manipulated, suppressed or destroyed information. What you need is an agency which is responsive to citizens and which has rights of investigations, like anti-cartel activities and which reports directly to Congress.

... With this package of legislative proposals, we could within one decade help move and help reverse the cancer epidemic to the relatively low rates of the 1940s, and at the same time ensure corporate responsibility. The way in which

this is going to be done, is by a mixture of white collar crime legislation, and also arousing the public to what democracy really means.