Specific exposures are as follows: smokers (and those living with smokers) have elevated levels of benzene, styrene, ethylbenzene and p-xylene on their breath. The sidestream of a cigarette provides much more benzene than does the smoke inhaled by the smoker (240 micrograms per cigarette in the sidestream vs. 35 micrograms in the mainstream). About 60% of U.S. children live in homes with smokers and are thus exposed to benzene, a cause of leukemia. Children with one parent smoking have a doubled risk of leukemia; with both parents smoking the risk of leukemia is increased five-fold (compared to children of non-smoking parents).

Chlorinated water causes indoor air in New Jersey to have four times as much chloroform as outdoor air.

A person visiting a dry cleaner for five minutes has twice as much tetrachloroethylene (PCE) on his or her breath, compared to a person avoiding such a visit. PCE levels in dry cleaning shops are very high.

Moth crystals and room deodorizers are intended to maintain high levels of p-dichlorobenzene in homes, so no one should be surprised that they succeed. Recently p-dichlorobenzene was determined to be a carcinogen. In homes using moth crystals or air deodorizers, p-dichlorobenzene levels are 25 times higher than in outside air (in NJ).

What can be done to reduce exposures to chemicals in the home and at work? Consumers can purchase less of the offending products (moth balls, for example); citizen pressure can force manufacturers to reduce their use of hazardous chemicals; citizen pressure can force government agencies to adopt standards for building materials (for example, particle board is today loaded with formaldehyde, a carcinogen); and ventilate the place better. Programs to force waste reduction will help little, if at all.


--Peter Montague

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GAO FINDS FEDERAL AGENCIES SLOW TO PLAN CLEANUP OF THEIR TOXIC DUMPS

The federal General Accounting Office (GAO) has issued a 36 page report, SUPERFUND: CIVILIAN FEDERAL AGENCIES SLOW TO CLEAN UP HAZARDOUS WASTES [GAO/RCED-87-153], which says federal agencies have so far found 1,882 hazardous waste sites on their property but have evaluated only half of them. Most agencies are still looking. The report is available free from GAO, DHHSF, P.O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20877; phone (202) 275-6241.

--Peter Montague

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Descriptor terms: superfund; remedial action; hazardous waste disposal technologies; epa; hazardous chemicals; indoor air pollution; nj; nc; nd; trichloroethane; trichloroethylene; chloroform; carbon tetrachloride; tetrachloroethylene; dichlorobenzene; plastics; heavy metals; carcinogens; drinking water; chlorination; testing; tobacco; leukemia; formaldehyde; pesticides; benzene; styrene;