

# Chemical Industry Funds Aid EPA Study

Effect of Substances on Children Probed

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The Environmental Protection Agency has agreed to accept \$2 million from the American Chemistry Council to help fund a study exploring the impact of pesticides and household chemicals on young children, prompting an outcry from environmentalists.

The Children's Environmental Exposure Research Study -- known by its acronym CHEERS -- does not mark the first time the agency has accepted chemical industry money to conduct research; the Clinton administration signed similar agreements. But it represents the most money the chemical trade group has given the EPA. The chemical industry council represents about 135 manufacturers and spends \$20 million a year on research.

Paul Gilman, who serves as science adviser and assistant administrator for the EPA's office of research and development, said the money will help the agency conduct "groundbreaking work" on how chemicals are absorbed by infants and children as old as 3.

"We will seek their opinions, but we're in control of the project," Gilman said. "We're comfortable with the fact that it's our study design."

Environmental Working Group President Kenneth A. Cook questioned why an agency with a \$572 million research budget needed to accept industry contributions to conduct scientific research.

"It simply is not credible that a \$7.8 billion agency that employs almost 18,000 people has to go to the chemical industry to get \$2 million for a crucial study to see if chemicals hurt kids," he said. "This is a government function; we should be investing government funds to be absolutely sure it's independent."

The study will survey 60 children over the next two years in Duval County, Fla., and collect information on their exposure to pesticides and household chemicals, such as flame retardants and perfluorinated chemicals, a family of substances in products such as Teflon and Scotchgard. Some of these chemicals have come under scrutiny for possible links to health problems.

Carol Henry, vice president for science and research at the American Chemistry Council, said her industry wanted to promote a better understanding of the risks associated with chemical exposure. Teaming up with a preexisting federal study gives her group financial leverage, she said.

"Exposure has been ignored for many, many years. It's the wasteland of risk assessment," Henry said. "We'd like the regulatory framework to be based on a very firm scientific foundation."

Henry said her association had set up a board of academics and industry officials to be "a resource to investigators" on an occasional basis, but added her group would not get advance notice of the results and the government would retain control over its findings. "We'll give them our guidance, but they don't have to take it," she said. The EPA's Gilman said it was reasonable to accept industry money in light of the gravity of the situation. Researchers still don't know how these compounds "are getting into our blood," he said, adding that young children are rarely studied, making the survey especially valuable.

In late September, Linda Sheldon, acting director for the EPA's human exposure and atmospheric sciences division, said the agency has "very little information about how children may be exposed to chemicals in household products, whether it's through the air they breathe, food they eat or the surfaces they touch."

Gilman said the chemical manufacturers imposed no conditions to their contribution: "They said, 'Who do we make the check out to?' It's \$2 million in additional support with no strings attached."

But Cook said he remained concerned industry officials could still influence a study that could lay the groundwork for future regulation. "To have industry sponsoring the government to do it, to us, doesn't seem like a good idea, to say the least," Cook said.