

# The Washington Post

## Scientists want to help regulators decide safety of chemicals

By Lyndsey Layton  
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 Friday, March 4, 2011; 12:49 AM

Groups representing 40,000 researchers and clinicians are urging federal agencies responsible for the safety of chemicals to examine the subtle impact a chemical might have on the human body rather than simply ask whether it is toxic.

In an open letter to the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency to be published Friday in the journal *Science*, the scientists say the regulatory agencies need to tap into genetics, developmental biology, endocrinology and other disciplines when they analyze the safety of chemicals used in everyday products.

"Although chemical testing and risk assessment have long been the domain of toxicologists, it is clear that the development of improved testing guidelines and better methods of assessing risks posed by common chemicals to which all Americans are exposed requires the expertise of a broad range of scientific and clinical disciplines," said the letter, which was signed by eight scientific societies.

Broader analysis is particularly needed for chemicals that disrupt the endocrine system, said Patricia Hunt, a molecular biologist at

Washington State University who helped write the letter.

"We're talking about picking the best geneticists, endocrinologists, reproductive biologists to consider new ways of testing these chemicals for safety," Hunt said. "The old toxicology paradigm doesn't work anymore."

A well-known example would be bisphenol A, a chemical widely used in plastic goods for decades, Hunt said. The chemical can leach from products into food and drink, and federal health officials say it is found in the urine of more than 90 percent of Americans.

The government has long said that BPA is safe, based on studies that show levels of BPA used in commercial products are not toxic - meaning they would not kill -

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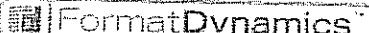
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humans.

But a growing body of research by endocrinologists, molecular biologists, reproductive specialists and others over the past 15 years has shown that low levels of BPA can cause changes in activity at the cellular level that cause health effects over time in laboratory animals.

Last year, the federal government commissioned \$30 million in new studies by scientists from a variety of disciplines to answer safety questions about BPA.

The FDA and the EPA did not have any comment on the letter.

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