

## Researchers Explore A New Toxic Pollution Site: People “Body Burden” Studies Are Raising Health Concerns And Prompting Stronger Government Actions

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WASHINGTON — After decades spent researching chemical contaminants in air, water and on land, scientists have begun to turn their attention to an important pollution site they have by and large neglected until now: people.

Using sensitive new laboratory techniques to detect chemicals and assess their health effects, a growing number of researchers in the United States and abroad are testing blood, urine and tissue for an array of environmental contaminants that find their way into the human population through pollution or consumer products.

Two studies being released this week are likely to give these “body burden” studies new prominence in environmental science and policy.

Environmental Working Group (EWG), in partnership with Mt. Sinai School of Community Medicine and Commonweal, today released the results of the most comprehensive evaluation to date of multiple chemical contaminants in people. Published in the peer-reviewed journal Public Health Reports, the study results offer an up-close and personal look at nine individuals whose bodies were tested for 210 chemicals – the largest suite of industrial chemicals ever surveyed.

The web-presented report is available at <http://www.ewg.org/>. It found:

Subjects contained an average of 91 compounds, most of which did not exist 75 years ago.

In total, the nine subjects carried 76 chemicals linked to cancer.

Participants had a total of 48 PCBs, which were banned in the U.S. in 1976 but are used in other countries and persist in the environment for decades.

A second study will be released Jan. 31 by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It provides statistical data relevant to Americans’ body burdens of 116 chemicals.

“The CDC has studied individual chemicals in a multitude of people; our study examined individual people for a multitude of chemicals,” said Jane Houlihan, EWG vice president for research. “The CDC’s work helps us assess exposure levels for each contaminant across the population; our study begins to document the complex reality of the human body burden—what we call the ‘pollution in people,’ ” said Houlihan.

She added: “Both studies are long overdue, and both reveal disturbing gaps in scientific understanding of environmental contaminants and in our system of regulatory safeguards.”

Body burden testing that has been conducted and made public to date often results in swift action by government and corporate leaders. Following a medical study showing high mercury levels in the blood of patients whose diets were high in mercury-contaminated fish, the State of California recently sued five grocery chains to force them to put labels on these products in the seafood aisle. When Scotchgard was found in virtually all Americans, 3M Company was forced to change the formula.

A majority (55%) of Americans mistakenly believe that the government tests chemicals used in consumer products to make sure they are safe, according to recent opinion research conducted by Washington Toxics Coalition. The federal government does not safety-test industrial chemicals, nor does it require manufacturers to submit testing data.

“People are loaded with chemicals,” said EWG Senior Vice President Richard Wiles. “Some are known carcinogens, and many are banned. There are some about which science knows virtually nothing when it comes to potential health effects. We need a modern, common sense approach to identifying and protecting the public from possible health effects from long-term exposure to low levels of multiple chemicals.”

View the interactive report to see the body burden of the 9 test subjects at:

<http://www.ewg.org/reports/bodyburden>