

Responsibility of the FDA and National Cancer Institute for Cosmetics Related Escalating Cancer Rates

CHICAGO, Aug. 15 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- In November 1994, the Cancer Prevention Coalition and the Center for Constitutional Rights submitted a Petition to the FDA calling for "Cancer Labeling of Talc Products." Talc products are regularly used by up to 17% of women for genital hygiene.

Supported by about 15 references in the scientific literature, the Petition warned that talc posed major fatal risks of ovarian cancer. These could be avoided by the use of cornstarch powder as a safe alternative. However, the Petition was rejected.

In May 2008, the Coalition submitted a further Petition updating the evidence for the major cancer risks of genital talc products, as detailed in 11 leading national and international scientific journals. This Petition was endorsed by leading national scientific authorities including Dr. Quentin Young, Chairman of the Health and Medicine Policy Research Group, and past president of the American Public Health Association; Dr. Peter Orris, Chief of Services, University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center; Ronnie Cummins, National Director of the Organic Consumers Association; and more recently the National Congress of Black Women. However, the FDA has failed to respond to the Petition.

As FDA Commissioner Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach, former Director of the National Cancer Institute, must be aware, the mortality from ovarian cancer for women over the age of 65 has escalated dramatically since 1975, by 13% for white and 47% for black women. There are now about 15,300 deaths from ovarian cancer each year. This makes it the fourth commonest fatal cancer in women after colon, breast and lung. Yet, Dr. von Eschenbach has

failed to mandate a cancer warning label on talc powder, let alone ban its continued use.

Dr. von Eschenbach's reckless indifference to cancer prevention extends to sunscreens. Sunscreens pose scientifically well-documented risks of cancer, besides toxic hormonal effects. While well known for over a decade, they remain unregulated by the FDA, and ignored by the industry.

Sunscreens block short wave ultraviolet light (UVB), which is responsible for sunburn. This encourages prolonged exposure, particularly of children. Moreover, sunscreens are ineffective against long wave ultraviolet light (UVA), which is responsible for malignant melanoma, the fastest growing known cancer. As a result, its incidence has increased by 130%, and its mortality has increased by 26% since 1975.

Of further concern is FDA's failure to issue new regulations for informative labeling of sunscreens as proposed in August 2007. In response to FDA's inaction, Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal wrote to the FDA on July 24 this year criticizing its failure to regulate the sunscreen industry, and prevent it from making "dangerously misleading claims" on the safety and effectiveness of its products. A week later, Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Christopher Dodd (D-CT) introduced the "Sunscreen Labeling Act of 2008." This gave the FDA six more months to finalize comprehensive rules, otherwise the Act will become law.

Talc products should be banned immediately. The "Sunscreen Labeling Act" should be the first step to developing a comprehensive "Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Labeling Act." This could be modeled along the lines of California's precedential 2007 Safe Cosmetics Act.

As warned by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) at September 10, 1997, Hearings on the FDA Reform Bill, "The cosmetics industry has borrowed a page from the playbook of the tobacco industry by putting profits ahead of public health." This warning remains recklessly unheeded by the FDA. Clearly, Dr. von Eschenbach is unwilling to protect the public against major avoidable risks of cancer from cosmetics. These include over 20 known carcinogens, and a similar number of "hidden" carcinogens or carcinogen precursors.

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