

Bush Administration Urges Caution On Phthalate Ban

Tue. Jun 10, 2008

Bush administration officials urged a House subcommittee to go slow on proposals to prohibit or curb the use of phthalates and bisphenol A, chemical compounds found in a range of consumer products. The testimony came as the House Energy and Commerce Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee prepared to take part in a conference negotiations that will decide the fate of a Senate-passed amendment to the Consumer Product Safety Reform Act banning the use of phthalates, a plastic softener, in children's toys. John Bucher, associate director of toxicology at the National Institutes of Health, told the panel that additional research was needed to confirm whether laboratory studies suggesting that phthalates produced genital malformations in male rats had any application to human babies. He said that "thus far no cause-and-effect relationship has been established between any substance and human outcomes."

Consumer Products Safety Commission chemist Michael Babich cited a 2001 commission study concluding that toys containing phthalates posed "a minimal to non-existent" danger to children because they would have to "routinely mouth" the toys for 75 minutes or more a day to subject themselves to risk. Babich added later that, in any event, the industry voluntarily removed phthalates from teething rings, pacifiers and rattles 10 years ago. As for bisphenol A, also known as BPA, a compound commonly found in baby bottles and other drink containers, FDA Associate Science Commissioner Norris Alderson said that, "although our research is ongoing, at this point FDA has no reason to recommend that consumers discontinue using food contact materials" that contain the substance. He said a "large body of evidence" indicated that these products "are safe, and that exposure levels to (BPA) from these materials, including exposure to children and infants, are below those that may cause health effects."

Supporters of the phthalates ban on the subcommittee remained firm in their support for the measure. "Should we wait for irrefutable proof (that phthalates are dangerous)" said Rep. **Darlene Hooley**, D-Ore., "I believe the answer is no." Rep. **Jan Schakowsky**, D-Ill., held up two rubber ducks, one with phthalates content and the other without it, and said that "if we know one is safe, why wait to remove the possibility" that the other could do harm. California and Washington state have banned the use of phthalates in children's toys, as has the European Union. Ten states have approved curbs on BPA. In April, Canada prohibited the importation and sale of the baby bottles containing the substance.