

July 14 - 2005 - Rep. Slaughter, Researchers Call for Stronger Safeguards Against Prenatal Pollution

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Study: Average of Over 200 Industrial Chemicals in Blood of Newborns

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), ranking Democrat on the House Rules Committee and the only microbiologist in Congress, today joined researchers from the Environmental Working Group (EWG) and Dr. Alan Green of DrGreen.com to publicize a shocking new study documenting the degree of chemical pollution present in the bodies of newborn infants.

The EWG investigation tested blood from ten newborn infants for a range of chemical pollutants, many of which are associated with abnormal development and poor health. On average, the infants had over 200 industrial chemicals in their blood. Ms. Slaughter's blood was also tested, and was revealed to contain 271 harmful substances.

"If ever this country had a wake-up call, it's the blood test results of these newborns," Rep. Slaughter said. "If we ever had proof that our nation's pollution laws aren't working, it's reading the list of industrial chemicals in the bodies of babies who have not yet lived outside the womb."

Ms. Slaughter also announced new legislation she has authored and will introduce today, the Environmental Health Research Act, designed to research the impact of environmental factors on the health of women and children.

"Over the last 30 years, the U.S. had seen a steep rise in the occurrence of numerous diseases and disorders impacting the minds and bodies of our children," Rep. Slaughter said. "Is there a connection with the more than 75,000 new chemicals that have been introduced into our environment since the 1950's?"

"We need to research the impact of these chemical pollutants now," Ms. Slaughter said. "Only then will we have the information we need both to detoxify and also to prevent developmental disabilities and other environmentally related diseases in future generations," she added.

"Let's not permit our babies of the future to be polluted before they are even born," Rep. Slaughter said.

BACKGROUND

Until recently, scientists believed that babies in the womb were largely protected from most toxic chemicals, but the EWG study helps confirm that chemical exposure begins before birth. Tests were conducted on 10 American Red Cross umbilical cord blood samples for the most extensive array of industrial chemicals, pesticides and other pollutants ever studied. The babies studied averaged 200 contaminants in their blood, including mercury, fire retardants, pesticides and the Teflon chemical PFOA.

Rep. Louise Slaughter spoke on these results, as well as the results of her own body burden testing, along with Jane Houlihan, EWG's vice president for research, and pediatrician Dr. Alan Greene, founder of www.drgreene.com and a clinical assistant professor at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH ACT

This bill has two major components.

First, it will authorize the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to develop multidisciplinary research centers regarding women's health and disease prevention. The Director of NIEHS, in consultation with the Director of the Office of Research on Women's Health, will make grants to public or non-profit institutions to develop and operate six centers for conducting multidisciplinary research on environmental factors related to the development of women's health conditions. The centers will conduct basic and clinical research, develop training protocols, conduct training programs, develop continuing education programs and disseminate information to health professionals and the public. The centers will pay special attention to activities that would prevent conditions and diseases from manifesting in women, and they may provide stipends for health professionals enrolled in programs. Finally, they will collaborate with community organizations and work with women suffering from disorders that appear to stem from environmental factors in their respective communities.

Secondly, NIEHS will be tasked with conducting and coordinating a research program studying the impact of hormone disrupting chemicals on maternal and child health. The program, operating in cooperation with the Geological Survey and agencies both foreign and domestic, will collect and disseminate scientifically valid information on the human health effects of hormone disrupting chemicals. It will place special emphasis on exposures to low doses of chemicals during critical life stages of development, including the impact of prenatal exposures on children's health. Furthermore, the program will evaluate the extent of human exposure to hormone disrupting chemicals in residential and occupational settings. Research will also focus on how hormone disrupting substances interact with biological systems, techniques for in vitro and in vivo methods to screen and test hormone disruption, and the levels and fate of hormone disrupting chemicals in the environment. The Secretary of HHS will establish the Hormone Disruption Research Interagency Commission to advise associated agencies on an agenda for carrying out research. There will also be a Hormone Disruption Research Panel to advise the Director on scientific content for the program.

Rep. Slaughter's Remarks:

During my life I've been called a lot of things from a microbiologist, to a mother of three, to a Member of Congress,

But today I seem to have earned a new title, one I never expected to have - I am now a walking chemical plant.

I participated in this important study to find out what toxic substances I in particular -- and American adults in general -- have been exposed to throughout my lifetime.

The stunning results show literally hundreds of chemicals pumping through my vital organs everyday.

These chemicals include PCBs that were banned decades ago as well as chemicals like Teflon that are currently under federal investigation.

Apparently, my body is home to toxic chemicals used to make insecticides, electrical cables, florescent lamps and even automobile engine oil... despite the fact that I tasked my husband with handling the car oil years ago.

I also have auto exhaust fumes, flame retardant chemicals, and in all, some 271 harmful substances pulsing through my

veins.

That's hardly the picture of health I had hoped for, but I've been living in an industrial society for over 70 years.

These ten newborn babies, however, that also were part in this study, they were born polluted.

On average each one had some 200 chemicals in their blood -- before they ever touched a blanket, a bassinet, a car seat, or even took their first breath.

If ever this country had a wake-up call, it's the blood test results of these newborns.

If ever we had proof that our nation's pollution laws aren't working, it's reading the list of industrial chemicals in the bodies of babies who have not yet lived outside the womb.

Obviously, banning chemicals after they have entered the environment is not enough.

That we have children coming into this world already polluted, at the same time we don't know what the effects of that pollution will be on their mental and physical development, is both bad policy and immorally wrong.

We must test chemicals before they go onto the market, not after they get into our bloodstreams.

Over the last 30 years, the U.S. has seen a steep rise in the occurrence of childhood cancers, testicular cancer, juvenile diabetes, attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities, thyroid disorders, cognitive impairment, and autoimmune disorders.

Autism cases alone rose 210% between 1987 and 1998.

And we ask ourselves, why? What's happening? Is there a connection with the more than 75,000 new chemicals that have been introduced into our environment since the 1950s?

Amazingly, there is still a lack of data on the potential neuro-developmental effects on women, on fetuses, and on how long-term, low-dose exposure to environmental pollutants impacts children at critical stages of development.

For five years, I have called on Congress to enact legislation that would allow NIH to research the impact that these chemical pollutants have on women and children.

Now, once again, I will soon introduce the Environmental Health Research Act.

Specifically, this bill does two things. First it authorizes the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences to develop 6 multidisciplinary research centers to investigate the association and impact of environmental factors on women's health.

It also authorizes the Director of this institute, in cooperation with other federal agencies, to establish a comprehensive program to conduct research on the impact of hormone disrupting chemicals affecting maternal and child health.

We need to research the impact of these chemical pollutants now. Only then will we have the information we need both to detoxify and also to prevent developmental disabilities and other environmentally related diseases in future generations.

Let's pass this legislation. Let's clean up our environment. Let's clean up our bodies, but most importantly, let's not permit our babies of the future to be polluted before they are even born.

