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EPA to announce plans for PFOA; TSCA.

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EPA plans to make an announcement early this week on PFOA, according to an agency spokesman.

Perfluorooctanoic acid and its salts, commonly referred to as PFOA or C8, have been making headlines since the Environmental Working Group publicized an internal EPA draft assessment of the common chemical, showing that exposure to PFOA may adversely affect young girls and women of childbearing age. EWG, a Washington, D.C.- based environmental research non-profit, has since launched a campaign to ban the chemical and to get EPA to conduct expedited reviews on the entire perflourochemical family.

An EPA spokesman told PTCN that the agency plans to formally release the preliminary risk assessment early this week, and to announce that it will ask industry to generate additional data on how PFOA impacts human health and exposure pathways.

A spokesman for DuPont, which manufactures the chemical, said his company and other members of the Flouropolymer Manufacturers Group have sent a letter of intent to EPA stating their intention to provide the additional data the agency needs to elucidate uncertainties in the preliminary risk assessment. The spokesman said he was unable to provide further details about the letter but expected a response from EPA shortly.

Asahi Glass Flouropolymers USA, Inc., Daikin America Inc., and Dyneon Flouropolymers also signed the letter of intent, according to Society of Plastics Industry spokeswoman Bonnie Limbach. DuPont has repeatedly said there is no evidence that PFOA causes adverse health effects and that data recently generated by the company will show that the chemical has a higher margin of safety than was determined in EPA's draft assessment.

According to EPA's preliminary risk assessment, PFOA's margin-of-exposure for females ranges from 66-80, while the MOE for males is 9,125-11,108. These calculations involved adult blood serum levels. Using serum samples from children aged two to 12, the agency determined MOE values of 66-75 for females and 9,125 to 10,478 for males.

The agency considers MOE values below 100 to be a potential sign of significant risk.

EWG support EPA's efforts

EWG said it has been studying the adverse health and environmental effects of PFCs for a few years.

The non-profit is pleased that EPA moved quickly to complete a PFOA risk assessment once an agency-conducted rat study linked the chemical to significant adverse health affects, said EWG Senior Scientist Kristina Thayer.

She said that agency has been "acting with lighting speed" compared to most regulatory decisions. Thayer said EWG expected EPA to turn to industry to get further data on PFOA and has no problems with industry providing that data as long as "there's some enforceable route to keep looking at these chemicals."

The public already has the two most important pieces of data on the chemical--how much is found in human blood and at what point it begins to adversely affect rats, Thayer said. Those two pieces of data, which are used to determine safe exposure levels, aren't going to change in the final analysis. She said further data will be used to fill in blanks, but won't change the chemical's potential to cause adverse health affects.

EWG has met with EPA officials twice since the EPA internal draft risk assessment was released at the end of March. Thayer said the discussions focused on the scientific data available on PFOA, not how the non-profit would like the agency to proceed.

There is a lot of debate about which organs are most sensitive to the chemical and what mode of action is responsible for causing adverse health affects, she said. DuPont alleges that the liver is the most important target organ for toxicity and that PFOA only acts through a single mode of action--peroxisome proliferation--that is not relevant to people.

"The worst case scenario is that DuPont will say PFOA causes X, Y, Z in lab rats but it only acts through this one mode of action," she said. There are four other possible MOAs, which may be less prominent than peroxisome proliferation but more dangerous, she added.

Thayer would also like the agency to look at telomer alcohols, which are used in fabrics, upholstery and rugs and breakdown into PFOA and sister chemicals.

"We're willing to be patient," she said. "It really is a priority issue at EPA and given the fast pace of their activities so far, we're willing to wait and see what happens."

RELATED ARTICLE: EWG asks EPA to investigate DuPont for withholding 8e info.

An environmental group has asked EPA to launch a federal investigation into whether DuPont violated TSCA reporting requirements.

On April 11, the Environmental Working Group sent a letter to EPA alleging that DuPont has withheld studies on the risks of perflourooctanoic acid, or PFOA, that should have been submitted to the agency under TSCA 8(e) reporting requirements.

Under Sec. 8(e), a company is required to report to EPA information that "reasonably supports the conclusion" that a given substance "presents a substantial risk of injury to health."

In its letter, EWG cites a 1981 internal company study that found PFOA in the umbilical cord of one baby and the blood of another baby, both born to women who worked at the company's Teflon plant in Parkersburg, W. Va. PFOA is used in the Teflon manufacturing process. According to EWG, the same study also found PFOA in the blood of seven out of eight pregnant women tested. A preliminary risk assessment conducted by EPA has found that PFOA may adversely affect young girls and women of childbearing age (see story, Page 1). The study was made public through a class action lawsuit lodged against the chemical manufacturer by residents living near the Parkersburg plant.

DuPont denies allegations that PFOA is a health hazard and said in a statement, released last Friday, that the company has not violated Sec. 8(e) requirements.

"The data referred to does not relate exposure to PFOA with any adverse health effects, was not designed to do so, and did not meet reporting requirements under Section 8(e) of TSCA," the statement said. "The information was not part of a study evaluating employee exposure or human health effects related to PFOA."

An EPA spokeswoman said the agency had received the EWG letter and is reviewing the allegations.

EPA is expected to formally release its preliminary risk assessment April 14. At the same time, the agency will announce its plans to conduct further assessments of the chemical.

EWG also alleges that DuPont withheld water contamination studies.

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