

# A P E R E S E A R C H C O U N C I L

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May 2, 2007

Mr. John Mancini  
Editor  
Newsday  
235 Pinelawn Road  
Melville, NY 11747  
[letters@newsday.com](mailto:letters@newsday.com)

Re: Letter to the Editor Regarding “The DIRT on getting Clean”

Dear Mr. Mancini:

The article “The DIRT on getting CLEAN” by Delthia Ricks, published in Newsday on April 15, was clearly written to be sensationalistic and in doing so gives a misleading impression that nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs) are responsible for the so-called “feminization” of fish reported in Jamaica Bay and the presumed enlarged breasts of young boys. The article also neglects to include an important, relatively new assessment from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that is directly relevant to the issue of understanding NPE exposure.

The article’s suggestion of a relationship between NPEs and enlarged breast is totally unfounded. In fact, we are not aware of any scientist that has suggested that NPEs may be associated with enlarged breast syndrome, technically known as “gynecomastia.” As far as we can determine, the inference of a connection between NPEs and gynecomastia appears to have originated in the Newsday article referenced above and now is appearing in an expanding list of spin-off articles by Delthia Ricks and others citing the original Newsday story.

The article refers to work initiated by Dr. Bloch, which found that boys with gynecomastia were able to stop their condition by discontinuing the use of lavender containing products. As written, the article suggest that this condition may also be associated with NPE, when there have been no suggestions from these - or any other researchers - that NPEs are related to gynecomastia. In fact, the NPEs that are found in consumer products do not possess estrogenic properties.

It is significant to note that not only have NPEs been the subject of considerable research but also nonylphenol (NP), a biodegradation intermediates that is generally considered to be more toxic. These compounds are among the most studied compounds in commerce today. Based on the results of numerous studies in laboratory animals, NPEs/NP have been found not to present a risk to humans at anticipated exposure levels. In fact, a recently published “gold-standard” study<sup>1</sup> that evaluated the effects of NP in rats over the course of three generations, found that there were no statistically significant effects on reproductive parameters in any

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<sup>1</sup> Tyl, R.W., Myers, C.B., Marr, M.C., Castillo, N.P., Seely, J.C., Sloan, C.S., Veselica, M.M., Joiner, R.L., Van Miller, J.P., and Simon, G.S. (2006). Three-generation evaluation of dietary para-nonylphenol in CD (Sprague-Dawley) rats. *Toxicological Sciences*, 92: (1) 295-310.

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generation. This study as well as others, including studies recently sponsored by the US government, is considered to have addressed the most significant concerns about the weak estrogenic activity of NP.

Regarding environmental issues, EPA recently completed a comprehensive assessment on NP and its potential effects to aquatic life. Based on that assessment, last year EPA adopted an ambient Water Quality Criteria (WQC) for NP that defines acceptable environmental concentrations.

There have been numerous studies, conducted primarily by the US Geological Survey that examined levels of NPEs and NP in US waters. A soon to be published paper<sup>2</sup> that examined measurements from over the past 15 years found that with only a few exceptions, environmental levels are significantly below EPA's WQC. In other words, the levels of NP and NPEs typically found in water are not toxic to fish and other aquatic species. In the few locations where NP concentrations were greater, the affected water bodies were contaminated with many pollutants, primarily from inadequate wastewater treatment.

The article also fails to acknowledge that the major environmental source of chemicals with estrogenic activity is both natural and synthetic human hormones. NP is approximately one million times less potent than human estrogen, which is discharged with human waste. While some detergent manufacturers and retailers have shifted away from the use of NPEs in their products, such a switch should not be assumed to automatically improve the environmental condition of receiving water bodies.

In summary, the author touches on some important issues being raised by researchers examining the question of whether the presence of numerous chemicals in everyday products, which are disposed of and treated in wastewater treatment systems and subsequently discharged to the environment, pose a risk to our ecosystem. However, for Newsday and its readers to credibly contribute to the discussion, an effort should be made to accurately present the science and avoid sensationalizing the issue with unfounded allegations.

We look forward to discussing this issue with you further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert J. Fensterheim". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'R' and 'F'.

Robert J. Fensterheim  
Executive Director

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<sup>2</sup> Klecka, G. et al. (2007). Exposure Analysis of C8- and C9-Alkylphenol, Alkylphenol Ethoxylates, and their Metabolites in Surface Water Systems within the United States. Journal of Human and Ecological Risk Assessment. (In press)