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## President's Cancer Panel Focuses Attention on Environmental Cancer Risks

Since 1996, the President's Cancer Panel, an advisory committee that monitors the work being done by the National Cancer Program, has released a report that has explored a different aspect of the country's war on cancer.

In May, the Panel released its 2008-2009 report "Reducing Environmental Cancer Risks: What We Can Do Now."

The Panel decided to tackle the topic of environmental cancer risks because, as it explained in a letter to the President, "With the growing body of evidence linking environmental exposures to cancer, the public is becoming increasingly aware of the unacceptable burden of cancer resulting from environmental and occupational exposures that could have been prevented through appropriate national action." The report, it explained, was a way to "jumpstart [a] national effort" to "identify the many existing but unrecognized environmental carcinogens and eliminate those that are known from our workplaces, schools, and homes."

And the Panel didn't mince words. We were "particularly concerned to find that the true burden of environmentally induced cancer has been grossly underestimated," they wrote, and we "[urge] you most strongly to use the power of your office to remove the carcinogens and other toxins from our food, water, and air that needlessly increase health care costs, cripple our Nation's productivity, and devastate American lives."

The response from environmental groups was loud and clear: they were thrilled to have their issues, concerns, and statistics placed clearly and forthrightly in front of the President by one of his advisory committees.

In contrast, the response from cancer organizations and cancer researchers was muted and mixed. Some applauded their work. But others questioned why the Panel had spent so much time on this topic, while ignoring factors like smoking and obesity, which are estimated to account for at least 30% of all cancers. (The panel's 2006-2007 report was "Promoting Healthy Lifestyles.")

We at Zero Breast Cancer applaud the Panel's work and the attention it has focused on environmental exposures to cancer. We established our organization because we were concerned about all potential environmental causes of breast cancer. We want to know the truth about environmental chemicals and breast cancer risk. We also want to know the true relationship between breast cancer risk and smoking, diet, exercise, and hormone replacement therapy.

Through our work at the Bay Area Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Center (BABCERC) we have seen firsthand the complexities of how environmental risks influence future breast cancer. We also are aware that there is little doubt that cancer is caused by a combination of both genetic and environmental factors, and that there is increasing evidence that when exposures occur over a person's lifetime plays a role as well. At the BABCERC, we view puberty

as one “window of susceptibility” in which the breast might be particularly susceptible to potential carcinogens, and that’s why we started an epidemiology study that is following 444 girls as they transition through puberty to learn more about the relationship between environmental estrogens and adult breast cancer risk.

It is not easy to get funding for this type of research. So, we were incredibly pleased to see the report highlight that “the cancer impact of exposures during key ‘windows of vulnerability’ such as the prenatal period, early life, and puberty are not well understood” and to underscore the importance of this type of research.

We also are pleased that the report emphasized that we do not know the extent to which cancer-causing and cancer-promoting environmental exposures affect babies and children, whose smaller bodies and rapid growth make them more vulnerable to carcinogens.

Many of the Panel’s policy recommendations are not only similar to ours, but reflect the work we are doing. They include:

- Implementing a precautionary, prevention-oriented approach to environmental contaminants
- Having environmental and public health advocates included in developing the environmental cancer research and policy agendas and in information dissemination
- Expanding and strengthening research on workplace exposures, the impact of in utero and childhood exposures, and the exposures that appear to have multigenerational effects.
- Keeping the public informed about risks from commonly used imaging and nuclear medicine procedures.
- Developing and disseminating public health messages that raise awareness of environmental cancer risks and encourage people to reduce or eliminate exposures whenever possible.

The Panel also highlighted things individuals can do to reduce their exposure to environmental carcinogens. This list, is similar to one Zero Breast Cancer has distributed in the past, and includes:

- Not microwaving food in plastic containers.
- Using stainless steel glass, or BPA and phthalate-free containers
- Filtering home tap or well water
- Decreasing exposure to pesticides by washing fruits and vegetables well and/or eating food grown without pesticides.
- Reducing or eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke.

The Panel also noted “each person can become an active voice in his or her community... to affect public policy by letting policymakers know that they strongly support environmental cancer research and measures that will reduce or remove from the environment toxics that are known or suspected carcinogens or endocrine-disrupting chemicals. “

We couldn't agree more! How can you get involved?

- Become a voice in your community.
- Write a letter or email to your legislators about your concerns for environmental exposures and breast cancer risk
- Contact the news media to draw attention to the problem
- Support research and environmental groups working to reduce exposures to environmental exposures such as Zero Breast Cancer.

To take action today, you can visit the National Resources Defense Council's Take Action website [here](#). Using this resource you can:

- Support the Safe Chemicals Act
- Support an initiative to President Obama to close the loophole in the Clean Water Act that permits the dumping of mining waste into waterways.
- Support the Clean Water Restoration Act which restores Clean Water Act protections to vital bodies of water.
- Support AB 2176 which minimizes the amount of mercury in household lighting (California residents only)

California residents can also visit Environment California's Take Action page for Environmental Health topics [here](#). With this resource you can support bans on BPA in California, tell toymakers to stop using phthalates in children's toys, and support policy to remove formaldehyde from infant crib materials.

Zero Breast Cancer is dedicated to finding the causes of breast cancer through community participation in the research process. We focus on identifying environmental factors and the role they play in the development of breast cancer at all stages of life and across generations. Zero Breast Cancer is an established leader in conducting breast cancer research and has redefined the way community organizations can participate in scientific studies. Working with community leaders, elected officials at all levels, and other non-profit organizations, Zero Breast Cancer urges the use of the Precautionary Principle as a guideline in environmental decision-making. To stay informed of the latest breast cancer and the environment research news, join our email list at <http://zerobreastcancer.org/>.