

Women's Environmental Health

It is long past time to examine women's environmental health, as discussed by Maureen C. Hatch in her editorial in *EHP* (1).

Before we turn to the same institutions that are biased against females, we should construct a more accurate view of women and their experiences. We can then determine if and when women are overexposed or are particularly susceptible to certain chemical agents.

At one time I had a home-based sewing business, and I was not pleased to learn that the warning labels, which are required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to indicate the presence of formaldehyde in fabrics, are removed before the fabric is sold to the public, i.e., very often women. To date, I have not been able to locate any studies on formaldehyde exposure in home-based seamstresses; on exposure when steam irons are used on Teflon-coated ironing board covers; on the use of chlorine bleach on formaldehyde-treated fabrics [does bis(chloromethyl)

ether form during steam ironing?]; or on exposure to fungicides found in fabrics. In other words, when it comes to "women's work," no one has even bothered to study potential exposures.

After having become sensitized to formaldehyde and other chemicals as a result of my work, I have found that the medical community knows little or nothing about occupational exposures of women to formaldehyde and seem to only offer a diagnosis of stress, treatment with psychotropic drugs, and a referral to a psychiatrist.

Cleaning products for use in the home are inadequately labeled, with minimal precaution notices. No one knows how the many chemicals react with each other or the health effects that result from these reactions.

Most cosmetic products that women use have not been adequately tested individually, and certainly not in combination with each other. How much of each chemical is absorbed through the skin? Some of these products, such as perfumes, do not even have their ingredients listed on the package.

Although the scientific community has been largely oblivious to the environmental

exposures of women, the legal community has not. In preparing depositions for toxic tort cases, many corporate and defense attorneys require the plaintiffs to respond to questionnaires and answer whether a product is used and how often, and for what duration she is exposed to cosmetics and the many chemicals used in the home, often in the course of doing "women's work."

The scientific community should believe women when they say they have been overexposed to chemicals and have health effects caused by these exposures. These women might then be used as a source for studying these exposures.

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REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Hatch MC. Centers needed to study women's environmental health. *Environ Health Perspect* 108:A10-A11 (2000).

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

In the article by Todd, "Calculating Bone-Lead Measurement Variance" [*EHP* 108:383-386 (2000)], two entries in Table 2 were incorrect. The corrected table is shown below.

Table 2. The contribution to an expression for the covariance from two terms, $\sigma_{x_i}^2 \sigma_{x_j}^2 / \text{coh}^4$ and $x_i^2 x_j^2 \sigma_{\text{coh}}^4 / \text{coh}^8$, expressed as a percentage of Equation Todd 1 and derived from the data of Gordon et al. (3).

Covariance	Human subject B ^a			Human subject C ^a		
	$\alpha 2$	$\beta 1$	$\beta 3$	$\alpha 2$	$\beta 1$	$\beta 3$
$\sigma_{x_i}^2 \sigma_{x_j}^2 / \text{coh}^4$						
$\alpha 1$	98.7	98.5	98.9	98.4	98.1	98.5
$\alpha 2$	—	99.3	99.7	—	99.2	99.6
$\beta 1$	—	—	99.5	—	—	99.3
$x_i^2 x_j^2 \sigma_{\text{coh}}^4 / \text{coh}^8$						
$\alpha 1$	3.715×10^{-5}	3.708×10^{-5}	3.721×10^{-5}	3.703×10^{-5}	3.692×10^{-5}	3.707×10^{-5}
$\alpha 2$	—	8.598×10^{-6}	8.629×10^{-6}	—	8.586×10^{-6}	8.621×10^{-6}
$\beta 1$	—	—	1.565×10^{-5}	—	—	1.563×10^{-5}

^aPercentage contribution to the total covariance expression.

In the June NIEHS News article "NIEHS Investigates Arctic Health Issues" [*EHP* 108:A261], William Suk was incorrectly identified as the director of the Chemical Exposures and Molecular Biology Branch at the NIEHS. Suk's correct title is deputy director for program development in the NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training. *EHP* regrets the error.