

## **Answers to Your Questions About IARC's Reclassification of Formaldehyde**

### **What is IARC?**

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. One of IARC's responsibilities is to organize reviews of scientific data to determine whether, using its own rating system, a material is a human carcinogen.

### **How did IARC previously classify formaldehyde?**

In 1987 IARC classified formaldehyde as a 2A "probable human carcinogen." IARC considered new studies of formaldehyde again in 1995 and maintained the rating at 2A. These previous classifications were based on a finding of "sufficient" evidence of carcinogenicity in animals, but only "limited" evidence in humans.

### **What action did IARC recently take concerning formaldehyde?**

IARC convened a "Working Group" of scientists to review newly available scientific data. The Working Group spent approximately one week reviewing the data and numerous peer reviewed studies regarding the potential health effects of formaldehyde. At the end of the meeting, the Working Group voted to recommend reclassification of formaldehyde as a "known carcinogen." In doing so, the panel concluded that both the human and animal data were now sufficient to conclude that formaldehyde, at the high doses seen in those studies, caused a rare nasopharyngeal cancer in humans.

### **Do you agree with the IARC Working Group's decision to change its classification?**

While disappointed with the recommendation, we continue to support sound science, and FCI looks forward to reviewing the IARC Monograph when it is released and studying its rationale. The "Monograph," or official review, has not yet been published.

### **What will be the impact of an IARC reclassification?**

The IARC classification is a "hazard identification." IARC has simply tried to answer the question of whether, under any circumstances, formaldehyde could produce nasopharyngeal cancer in humans. The current regulations adopted by OSHA provide a comprehensive approach to regulating exposures to formaldehyde in the workplace. We believe that exposures are low and that

workers in our industries are provided with a safe place to work and not likely to develop this rare nasopharyngeal cancer.

### **Should the government reevaluate current regulations based on the IARC decision?**

The industry supports the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) formaldehyde standard. The extensive regulations regarding formaldehyde protect human health and the environment and ensure responsible production, handling and use. The industry encourages continued comprehensive monitoring and control of formaldehyde exposures.

### **Should workers be concerned with the reclassification?**

Almost all of the workplace exposures relied upon by IARC in reaching its assessment occurred during the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Levels of formaldehyde in the workplace have declined dramatically over the past few decades due to improved manufacturing practices.

Given OSHA's limits on permissible exposures, requirements for monitoring employee exposures, required uses of engineering controls, mandatory medical surveillance and improved hazard communication and training guidance, workers should be confident that the current low exposures in the industrial workplace meet government standards and are protective of their health.

### **Should the public be concerned?**

Formaldehyde is a commonly occurring material in our society. It is present in many of the products we use. It is naturally produced by our bodies. It is generated by many of the routine activities that we undertake in our everyday life. Exposures today are generally low. Current government regulations help assure that they will remain low and protect human health and the environment.

### **What is formaldehyde?**

Formaldehyde, a simple chemical made of hydrogen, oxygen and carbon, is a natural part of our world. We make it in our bodies and it occurs naturally in the air that we breathe. Plants and animals also produce formaldehyde. It is even emitted as a byproduct of certain vegetables, such as brussels sprouts and cabbage, when they are cooked.

### **How is formaldehyde used?**

First used as a biological preservative more than a century ago, today formaldehyde is a critical ingredient in the production of hundreds of items that improve everyday life. While little or no formaldehyde is present in the final

product, the chemical is an essential building block in the production of some of the most common consumer items, including paper towels, furniture, cabinets, photographic film, and some cosmetics and personal care products.

### **What is the Formaldehyde Council, Inc?**

The Formaldehyde Council, Inc. (FCI) is a group of leading formaldehyde producers and users. FCI is dedicated to promoting the responsible use and benefits of formaldehyde and ensuring its accurate scientific evaluation. For more information about FCI, visit our Web site, [www.formaldehyde.org](http://www.formaldehyde.org)