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NEWS RELEASE



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CHEMICAL EXPOSURES ON THE JOB MAY BE LINKED TO DISEASES IN NURSES

First ever national survey finds widespread exposure to chemicals and radiation and almost no mandatory workplace health protections.

SILVER SPRING, MD – A first ever national survey of nurses' exposures to chemicals, pharmaceuticals and radiation on the job suggests there are links between serious health problems such as cancer, asthma, miscarriages and children's birth defects and the duration and intensity of these exposures. The survey included 1,500 nurses from all 50 states.

The results were released online today at, <http://www.ewg.org/reports/nursesurvey>, by the Environmental Working Group, the American Nurses Association, Health Care Without Harm, the Environmental Health Education Center at the University of Maryland School of Nursing. The survey was extremely detailed and is the first of its kind, but it was not a controlled, statistically designed study.

Every day, nurses confront low-level but repeated exposures to mixtures of hazardous materials that include residues from medications, anesthetic gases, sterilizing and disinfecting chemicals, radiation, latex, cleaning chemicals, hand and skin disinfection products, and even mercury escaping from broken medical equipment. There are no workplace safety standards to protect nurses from the combined effects of these exposures on their health.

"Nurses are exposed daily to scores of different toxic chemicals and other hazardous materials whose cumulative health risks have never been studied," said Jane Houlihan, Vice President for Research at Environmental Working Group. "Nurses ingest, touch or breathe residues of any number of these potentially harmful substances as they care for patients, day after day and face potential but unstudied health problems as a result."

"This survey is a call to action for nurses to demand the use of safer products and protective measures to control exposures to hazardous agents in the workplace," said Anna Gilmore Hall, RN, executive director of Health Care Without Harm, an international coalition working to reduce the environmental impact of the health care sector.

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The Centers for Disease Control proposed a National Occupational Exposure Survey for the health care industry in 2002. To date, no such survey has been initiated to better understand the range of potentially hazardous chemical exposure in the health care industry and related illnesses.

"For many of the toxic chemicals in hospitals there are safer alternative or safer processes. We must make these healthier choices for the sake of our patients, nurses and all hospital employees," said Barbara Sattler, RN, DrPH, FAAN, Professor and Director of the Environmental Health Education Center at the University of Maryland School of Nursing.

"ANA is dedicated to ensuring the health and safety of nurses and their patients," said Rebecca M. Patton, MSN, RN, CNOR, President, American Nurses Association. "We are pleased to work with our partners to bring attention to the growing concern over chemical exposures in the workplace, and ANA will continue its efforts on behalf of the nursing profession to create healthier working environments."

Environmental Working Group is a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, DC that uses the power of information to protect human health and the environment.

Health Care Without Harm is an international coalition of over 460 organizations in more than 50 countries, working to transform the health care sector so it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment.

The Environmental Health Education Center at the University of Maryland School of Nursing engages in education, practice, research, and policy regarding the relationship between the environment and human health. The School of Nursing, founded in 1889, is one of the oldest and largest nursing schools, and is ranked seventh nationally. Enrolling more than 1,600 students in its baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders who shape the profession of nursing and impact the health care environment.

American Nurses Association is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 2.9 million registered nurses through its 54 constituent member nurses associations. The ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.

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