

Researching Stem Cells? "Murder!" Poisoning Poor Kids? "Good Science (& Business)"

A Blog Entry in Comments From Left Field and GordonTalk

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The biggest problem for us on the Left is most of us just don't come from a position of ignorance, greed, hypocrisy, and utter contempt for anyone but ourselves. So we are constantly caught off-guard by the more blatant excesses of the Right. Case in point ...

What pitiful excuses for human beings would pay poor families \$970 to spray pesticides in their kids' rooms, give the infants and toddlers (up to age 3) teething rings and slices of cheese—things that they figure the kids would drop on the sprayed floor and then put back into their mouths—and then give the whole program—established to try to loosen standards on exposures of children to pesticides—the acronym "CHEERS" (as emblazoned on souvenir merchandise, like baby bibs, that the families got to keep, in addition to the expensive camcorders the families were to instructed use to record what happened to the kids—the families never told to expect any health problems, which by themselves would not be cause for stopping the study, according to the protocol)? What would you call the *monsters* in charge of such inhuman human experimentation, using babies as guinea pigs?

Us. That is, U.S. taxpayers, through the U.S. Environmental "Protection" Agency.

Part of the same Geo. W. Bush administration that damns experimentation with mindless, formless stem cells as murder most foul.

To be perfectly accurate, the [Children's Environmental Exposure Research Study](#), conducted in Jeb Bush's Florida with \$2 million in funding from the American Chemistry Council, representing 135 pesticide and other chemical companies, has been put on hold, after some U.S. EPA scientists with a conscience blew the whistle and members of Congress protested.

However, like some madman in a bad horror flick who just won't die, the CHEERS program—and others like it—could arise again under the new guidelines for human experimentation now being proposed by the Bush EPA, in many respects contrary to the protections demanded by a bipartisan majority in Congress.

According to an internal draft of the proposals just obtained by the [Baltimore Sun](#) and by the [Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility \(PEER\)](#), as cited by the [Washington Post](#), the new guidelines would for

the first time establish ethical standards by the EPA for toxic chemical experimentation on human beings; however, the EPA would still lack institutional review boards (as in medical studies) and would allow loopholes big enough to drive a chemical tanker truck through:

- The guidelines would allow human subjects—including pregnant women, fetuses, and children (including orphans and wards of the court)—to be exposed to toxic chemicals as long as the main purpose of the experiment was to measure their exposure levels to the chemicals or the absorption or metabolism of the chemicals in their bodies, not specifically the toxicity of the chemicals (which, of course, are toxic, or they wouldn't be tested).
- The guidelines would allow the use of data from earlier experiments that don't meet the new ethical standards as long as they met the "ethical standards prevailing at the time" (Folks, you'd better finish up those on-going tests before these pesky new rules come into play: You know, things like the studies you've done in which you don't tell the subjects what they are being exposed to or why).
- The guidelines would allow paying large "inducements" of money to subjects who are poor or prisoners so that they might "volunteer."
- And the guidelines would allow studies like CHEERS to proceed, because the subjects

were not being exposed to the chemicals "intentionally": The Bush EPA defends the program by saying that because the parents were applying the pesticides to the kids' rooms voluntarily, it was not an "intentional dosing" experiment.

Yeah, "stuff" happens. Like these guidelines.

I have to confess, that although I spent the better part of the '80s and '90s researching and publishing [works on biological controls as alternatives to pesticides](#) (things like using carefully selected species of stingless "wasps" to parasitize targeted species of crop-eating caterpillars), I was unaware of the guidelines (or lack thereof) regulating human experimentation with pesticides.

[The fact of the matter is](#), pesticide manufacturers were pretty much free to conduct experiments on human beings until President Clinton imposed a moratorium on such studies in 1998. Although President Bush initially backed the ban, he lifted it in 2003, in compliance with a court order in a case brought by chemical manufacturers. Since then, the Bush EPA has been considering data from human testing on a "case by case" basis, the judgments highly questionable in the absence of any standards.

According to a spokesperson for PEER, "EPA's priority is to make the pesticide industry happy and to ensure that ethical considerations do not interfere with business as usual."

And as for the new guidelines? Well, after final review by the President's Office of Management and Budget, they will be published in the *Federal Register* for 90 days of public comment before taking effect in about six months. But the comments have already started flooding in.

Having led the fight against human experimentation with pesticides thus far, [Senator Barbara Boxer \(D-Calif.\)](#) has written to the EPA administrator that the proposal "fails to adequately ensure that people, including the most vulnerable among us, are protected from unethical industry tests in which human subjects swallow, inhale, are sprayed with, or are otherwise exposed to toxic pesticides. ... [The] EPA appears to be heading on a course at variance with the dictates of Congress, as well as religious groups, public health and environmental groups that supported congressional action."

Indeed, the following groups and individuals have already gone on record ([here](#) and [here](#)) as opposing the EPA guidelines as proposed:

- Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.)
- National Resources Defense Council
- The Environmental Working Group
- Physicians for Social Responsibility
- Mount Sinai Center for Children's Health and the Environment

- The United Farm Workers (UFW members who handle pesticides regularly as part of their job want a [national monitoring program](#) in which their blood is tested regularly for pesticide exposure—such programs have saved lives in California and Washington state—but the Bush EPA has declined to act)
- And various toxicologists, health experts, and lawyers at the EPA's headquarters and regional offices—some of whom request anonymity, in fear of retribution.

Of course, on the other side, [a spokesperson for the Bush EPA](#) said that their new proposal is "a landmark regulation that will extend very rigorous protections to the public ... and adheres to the highest ethical standards set for federal agencies."

And a spokesperson for Croplife America, the pesticide industry trade organization and lobbying group, insists that human testing is done only to increase safety and has [nothing to do with profits](#).

You'll excuse me if I ain't buyin' it. Although all of us may be swallowin' it—because the looser the standards on pesticides, the more that all of us will be breathing, eating, and drinking.

CHEERS!