Identifying and Controlling Pulmonary Toxicants

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Foreword

History reveals an enduring respect for lung function. In the biblical account of creation, man becomes a living soul when he receives the breath of life. Edward I of England banned the use of coal in 1273 because he found inhaling its smoke detrimental to human health. When asked how to ensure a long life, Sophie Tucker replied, “Keep breathing.”

This Background Paper examines whether the agencies responsible for administering Federal environmental and health and safety laws have taken this concern for respiratory health to heart. Prepared at the request of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and its Subcommittee on Toxic Substances, Environmental Oversight, Research and Development, the study describes technologies available to identify substances toxic to the lung and Federal efforts to control human exposure to such substances through regulatory and research programs. The analysis shows that new technologies hold great promise for revealing the potential adverse effects on the lung of new and existing substances, but that much remains to be learned. This Background Paper provides a partial response to the committees’ request for an assessment of noncancer health risks in the environment and follows OTA’s previous work on carcinogenic, neurotoxic, and immunotoxic substances.

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John H. Gibbons
Director
Note: OTA appreciates the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the workshop participants. The participants do not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this background paper. OTA assumes full responsibility for the background paper and the accuracy of its contents.
**Reviewers and Contributors**

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Lois Adams  
Office of Technology Assessment Liaison  
Office of Legislative Affairs  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Heinz W. Ahlers, J.D.  
Division of Standards Development and Technology Transfer  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

John R. Balmes, M.D.  
Assistant Professor of Medicine  
Center for Occupational and Environmental Health  
University of California, San Francisco

Rebecca Bascom, M.D.  
Director, Environmental Research Facility  
School of Medicine  
University of Maryland

Robert P. Baughman, M.D.  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
Pulmonary/Critical Care Division  
University of Cincinnati

Paul D. Blanc, M.D., M. S.P.H.  
Assistant Professor of Medicine  
Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine  
University of California-San Francisco

James C. Bonner, Ph.D.  
Staff Fellow  
Laboratory of Pulmonary Pathobiology  
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

Carroll E. Cross, M.D.  
Division of Pulmonary-Critical Care Medicine  
Department of Internal Medicine  
University of California-Davis Medical Center

Roger Detels, M.D., M.S.  
Professor of Epidemiology  
School of Public Health  
University of California-Los Angeles

Fran Du Melle  
Deputy Managing Director  
American Lung Association

June Friedlander  
Staff Specialist  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Suzie Hazen  
Director, 33/50 Program  
Office of Air and Radiation  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Hillel S. Koren, Ph.D.  
Acting Director  
Human Studies Division  
Health Effects Research Laboratory  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Martin Landry  
Budget Analyst  
Financial Management Office  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

John L. Mason, Ph.D.  
Vice President  
Engineering and Technology  
Allied Signal Aerospace Co. (Ret.)

Barbara Packard, M. D., Ph.D.  
Associate Director for Scientific Program Operations  
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Jerry Phelps  
Program Analyst  
Office of Program Planning and Evaluation  
Office of Director  
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

William A. Pryor, Ph.D.  
Director  
Biodynamics Institute  
Louisiana State University
OTA Project Staff-Identifying and Controlling Pulmonary Toxicants

Roger C. Herdman, Assistant Director, OTA
Health and Life Sciences Division

Michael Gough, Biological Applications Program Manager

Holly L. Gwin, Project Director
Margaret McLaughlin, Analyst
Ellen Goode, Research Assistant
Katherine Kelly, Contractor

Desktop Publishing Specialists
Jene Lewis
Linda Rayford-Journiette
Carolyn Swarm

support staff
Cecile Parker, Office Administrator