



**Emerging Environmental Issues in
Perinatal and Child Health: Questions,
Quandaries and Quagmires**

Fifteenth Annual Maternal and Child
Health Epidemiology Conference



Environmental Threats to Parents' and Children's Health: More Heat Than Light?

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Toxic Baby Bottles

Scientific study finds leaching chemicals
in clear plastic baby bottles

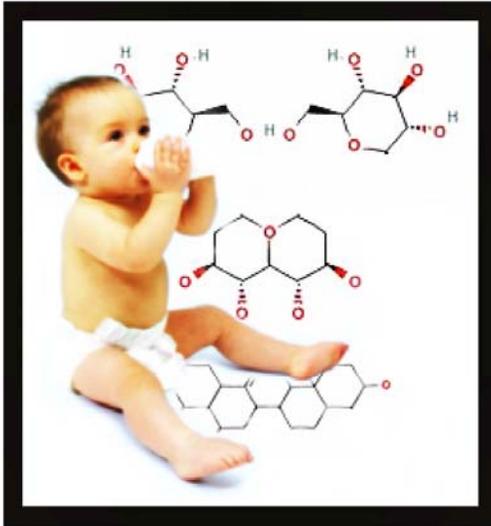
2007



“• Scientists have linked very low doses of bisphenol A exposure to cancers, impaired immune function, early onset of puberty, obesity, diabetes, and hyperactivity, among other problems.”

“• For example, in one recent study, a single, low dose of bisphenol A administered to a newborn rat resulted in hyperactive behavior.”

“• Based on a consumer survey of the most popular baby bottle brands on the market, we selected five bottle types to determine the amount of leaching from each bottle. We found that the bottles tested from all five brands leached bisphenol A at levels found to cause harm in numerous laboratory studies....” (page 5)



“Scientific debate isn't driving the baby bottle war; a hard-hitting push by activist groups, politicians and trial lawyers is...” – *Marc Gunther, Fortune Magazine* (page 16)

Science Suppressed: How America became obsessed with BPA

A STATS investigation

Trevor Butterworth

June 12, 2009
(updated June 30)

“They [vom Saal et al] just say that all studies by industry are biased, which frees them of any need to demonstrate that they are correct” – *Wolfgang Dekant, Professor of Toxicology, University of Würzburg* (page 19)



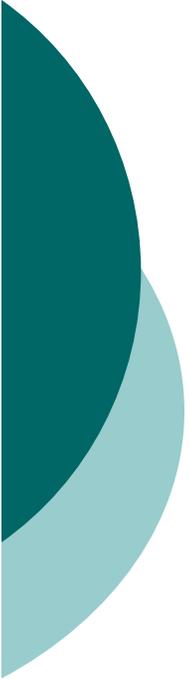
Where You Stand Depends on Where You Sit.....

Although most conflicts are undoubtedly subconscious



Industry's Conflicts of Interest are Obvious

- At the individual level, nobody wants to believe that their product might be causing harm
- More cynically, at the collective level, industry earns a profit manufacturing the substance under scrutiny
- Even if they just use the substance in their product, changing production to use something else entails cost and uncertainty, and most businesses are fundamentally risk-averse



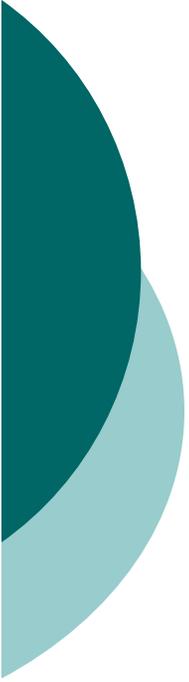
Critics May Hide Their Conflicts



- “The STATS website did not list funding sources as of 2008 but states that “we do not take money from industry or industry-related groups”.^[9] However, Media Transparency lists startup funding for STATS as having come from conservative funders including the John M Olin Foundation, the Sarah Scaife Foundation.....”

http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Statistical_Assessment_Service (Accessed 3 Nov 2009)

Take home message – Even if you don’t take industry money, your funders might still have their own agenda



Academics' Conflicts Might be More Subtle

- We all want to believe we are researching a problem that is important
- More cynically, we can submit a grant proposal for additional research to refine our positive findings
- At the collective level, Positive results ———→
Public concern—————→
Congressional concern—————→
Increased research funding for the topic



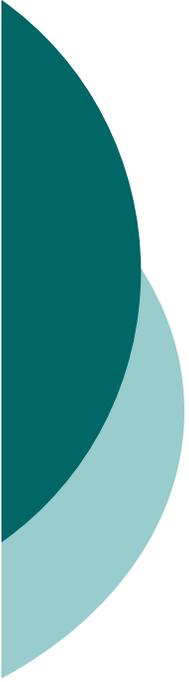
Today's Speakers

- Chosen for not being dismissive of imperfect evidence on one hand, nor for being given to push the panic button on the other hand



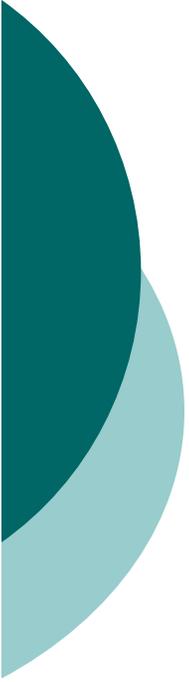
Pauline Mendola, PhD

- Chief, Infant, Child and Women's Health Statistics Branch, NCHS
- Background in environmental and reproductive/perinatal epidemiology
- Discussion of environmental concerns, strengths and weaknesses of evidence, principles of when to act on concerns



George Rhoads, MD, MPH

- Professor of Epidemiology, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, SPH, UMDNJ
- Background in cardiovascular, perinatal and environmental epidemiology
- Discussion of limitations of observational research and pragmatic suggestions for overcoming them



Kevin Sherin, MD, MPH

- Director, Orange County (Florida) Health Department; President, American Association of Public Health Physicians
- Background in family medical practice, local health officer of 3 jurisdictions in 2 states
- Discussion of response to public concerns when you don't have the luxury of saying "more research is needed....."