

WHO's cancer agency: Diesel fumes cause cancer

By Maria Cheng, Associated Press

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Diesel fumes cause cancer, the World Health Organization's cancer agency declared Tuesday, a ruling it said could make exhaust as important a public health threat as secondhand smoke.

The risk of getting cancer from diesel fumes is small, but since so many people breathe in the fumes in some way, the science panel said raising the status of diesel exhaust to carcinogen from "probable carcinogen" was an important shift.

"It's on the same order of magnitude as passive smoking," said Kurt Straif, director of the IARC department that evaluates cancer risks. "This could be another big push for countries to clean up exhaust from diesel engines."

Since so many people are exposed to exhaust, Straif said there could be many cases of lung cancer connected to the contaminant. He said the fumes affected groups including pedestrians on the street, ship passengers and crew, railroad workers, truck drivers, mechanics, miners and people operating heavy machinery.

The new classification followed a weeklong discussion in Lyon, France, by an expert panel organized by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. The panel's decision stands as the ruling for the IARC, the cancer arm of the World Health Organization.

The last time the agency considered the status of diesel exhaust was in 1989, when it was labeled a "probable" carcinogen. Reclassifying diesel exhaust as carcinogenic puts it into the same category as other known hazards such as asbestos, alcohol and ultraviolet radiation.

The U.S. government, however, still classifies diesel exhaust as a likely carcinogen. Experts said new diesel engines spew out fewer fumes but further studies are needed to assess any potential dangers.

"We don't have enough evidence to say these new engines are zero risk, but they are certainly lower risk than before," said Vincent Coglianò of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. He added that the agency had not received any requests to reevaluate whether diesel definitely causes cancer but said their assessments tend to be in line with those made by IARC.

Experts in Lyon had analyzed published studies, evidence from animals and limited research in humans. One of the biggest studies was published in March by the U.S. National Cancer Institute. That paper analyzed 12,300 miners for several decades starting in 1947. Researchers found that miners heavily exposed to diesel exhaust had a higher risk of dying from lung cancer.

Lobbyists for the diesel industry argued the study wasn't credible because researchers didn't have exact data on how much exposure miners got in the early years of the study; they simply asked them to remember what their exposure was like.

Further restrictions on diesel fumes could force the industry to spend more on developing expensive new technology. Diesel engine makers and car companies were quick to point out emissions from trucks and buses have been slashed by more than 95 percent for nitrogen oxides, particulate and sulfur emissions.

"Diesel exhaust is only a very small contributor to air pollution," the Diesel Technology Forum, a group representing companies including Mercedes, Ford and Chrysler, said in a statement. "In southern California, more fine particles come from brake and tire wear than from diesel engines."

A person's risk for cancer depends on many variables, from genetic makeup to the amount and length of time of exposure to dangerous substances.

Some experts said the new cancer classification wasn't surprising.

"It's pretty well known that if you get enough exposure to diesel, it's a carcinogen," said Ken Donaldson, a professor of respiratory toxicology at the University of Edinburgh who was not part of the IARC panel. He said the thousands of particles, including some harmful chemicals, in the exhaust could cause inflammation in the lungs and over time, that could lead to cancer.

But Donaldson said lung cancer was caused by multiple factors and that other things like smoking were far more deadly. He said the people most at risk were those whose jobs exposed them to high levels of diesel exhaust, like truck drivers, mechanics or miners.

"For the man on the street, nothing has changed," he said. "It's a known risk but a low one for the average person, so people should go about their business as normal ... you could wear a mask if you want to, but who wants to walk around all the time with a mask on?"

Ranchers see change in attitude from federal FWS

By Dennis McCall

Taft Midway Driller, Wednesday, June 13, 2012

Taft, Calif. — Richard and Susie Snedden are hoping for a thaw in what until now has been a frigid relationship with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over a plan to manage the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge that borders their cattle ranch southeast of Maricopa.

Four years in the making, the plan envisions spending \$6.7 million (not including the cost of personnel) to enhance the habitat of the endangered California condor.

"The first meeting (in 2008) was a pretty hostile deal," said Richard Snedden. "I didn't see any disrespect this time."

Prior meetings between the USFWS and property owners were filled with rancor, but this time around the give-and-take was much more amiable because, ranchers say, there has been a change in command at Fish and Wildlife.

"The attitude is exceptionally good compared to what we're used to," said Art Steinbeck, a rancher who lives "in the middle of that refuge" and formerly grazed cattle there.

He welcomes the change.

"All it's ever been is a street fight, but this is a whole different atmosphere. These are good guys."

The Sneddens, who share 13 miles of common border with Bitter Creek, have a few objections to the management plan rolled out May 17 during an open house in Taft.

Concerns include use of prescribed burning, introduction of elk and antelope and pending agreements between USFWS and the Bureau of Land Management that would impinge on more than 5,000 acres of Snedden ranch property.

"Fire, elk and antelope are not necessary components for the recovery of the condor or for the biodiversity of the Bitter Creek," the Sneddens said in their formal response to the plan.

After local, county, state and national officials strongly objected to prescribed burning during a "scoping" meeting two years ago, the Sneddens thought they had been assured the idea had been scrubbed.

They want "the use of fire and burning to be completely removed" from the management plan.

“The Bitter Creek Refuge topography, wind patterns and neighboring vicinity are too vulnerable to the possibility of escaped fire, which could destroy humans, animals, property and [air quality](#),” they say and recommend instead “an effective livestock grazing plan to mitigate the fire hazard.”

For the last century, cattle have grazed the northern fringe of the land that became the Bitter Creek Refuge in 1985. Grazing, a practice ranchers contend contributes to the biodiversity of the area, was banned seven years.

Replacing grazing by introducing elk and antelope to the refuge does not help preserve condors, the Snedden response noted, because those animals are not native to the area. Instead, they would like to see efforts to control predatory mountain lions.

“U.S. taxpayers can’t afford to feed million dollar condors to mountain lions for lunch,” they wrote.

The Sneddens say they just want their concerns taken seriously along with an acknowledgement that they are caring stewards of the land.

“We want them to understand that they are not the only ones taking care of the country and the critters,” Richard said.

Their frustrations and even pessimism stems from their belief that those making decisions on how best to manage Bitter Creek have never set foot on the Refuge.

They also are frustrated at being ignored.

“No one has talked to us at all since the meeting two years ago,” Richard said.

That’s why they “have little reason to believe” their concerns will be considered but hope attitudes will change.

They reminded Fish and Wildlife management of the agency’s self-proclaimed guiding principle to “respect the rights, beliefs and opinions of our neighbors.”

All the Sneddens want is for the Service to “do no harm to their neighbors.”