



When Sen. David Vitter persuaded the EPA to agree to yet another review of its long-delayed assessment of the health risks of formaldehyde, he was praised by companies that use or manufacture a chemical found in everything from plywood to carpet.

As long as the studies continue, the EPA will still list formaldehyde as a "probable" rather than a "known" carcinogen, even though three major scientific reviews now link it to leukemia and have strengthened its ties to other forms of cancer. The chemical industry is fighting to avoid that designation, because it could lead to tighter regulations and require costly pollution controls.

"Delay means money. The longer they can delay labeling something a known carcinogen, the more money they can make," said James Huff, associate director for chemical carcinogenesis at the National Institute for Environmental Health in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The EPA's chemical risk assessments are crucial to protecting the public's health because they are the government's most comprehensive analysis of the dangers the chemicals present and are used as the scientific foundation for state and federal regulations. But it usually takes years or even decades to get an assessment done, or to revise one that is outdated. Often the industry spends millions on lobbying and on scientific studies that counter the government's conclusions.

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