

**NANOTECHNOLOGY HEALTH AND SAFETY FEARS:  
ARTICLE IN THE AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPER (14 MAY '08)**

**ISSUE**

On 14 May 2008 The Australian Newspaper printed an article entitled, "*Cloud over silver linings*" with the bi-line "*Nanotechnology promises medical miracles, even a cure for smelly socks, but research into safety lags far behind.*" The report suggests environmental and health research is lagging behind the industrial development and use of nanotechnology (nanomaterials).

**KEY TALKING POINTS**

- The Government is aware of the article, which refers to the use of nanotechnology in a variety of industries, including consumer products, and welcomes the views of all interested parties.
- The Government is aware of the petition filed against the US Environmental Protection Agency (1 May 2008), demanding the cessation of the sale of consumer products using nanosized versions of silver. The petition was filed by The International Center for Technology Assessment, in conjunction with a coalition of consumer, health and environmental groups.
- One of the key goals of the current National Nanotechnology Strategy is to address the regulatory requirements in relation to the potential health, safety and environmental impacts of nanotechnology. This is an issue of vital importance, and work is being undertaken across all of government to ensure we get the best advice about how to move forward.
- The Government already has robust regulations to ensure the safety of food, medicines and chemicals.
- The Health portfolio regulatory agencies continually assess the risks of these products.
- The regulators have been aware of the possible future uses of nanotechnology and the health and safety aspects of the technology for some time. They are working with their overseas counterparts and international organisations to address emerging issues.
- NICNAS undertook a voluntary call for information on industrial nanomaterials in use in Australia, with results published in early 2007. NICNAS continues to maintain this current awareness of industrial nanomaterials in use and development in Australia through engagement with industry, community and researchers. NICNAS is also active involved with international developments in nanomaterials through the OECD Working

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Party on Manufactured Nanomaterials.

- Associated with the above methods to keep abreast of developments and deal with future issues, NICNAS has convened a Nanotechnology Advisory Group, comprised of industry and community representatives, and academic experts. NICNAS also has an in-house nanotechnology taskforce.

**BACKGROUND**

**Article in the Australian Newspaper**

On 14 May 2008 The Australian Newspaper printed an article entitled, "*Cloud over silver linings*" with the by-line "*Nanotechnology promises medical miracles, even a cure for smelly socks, but research into safety lags far behind*" (**Attachment A**). The report suggests environmental and health research is lagging behind the industrial development and use of nanotechnology (nanomaterials).

The Australian Government has in place robust regulatory arrangements to ensure the safety of industrial chemicals. The regulatory instrument established to regulate industrial chemicals in Australia is the *Industrial Chemicals (Notification and Assessment) Act* (the Act).

Chemical regulators in many countries have been watching the development of nanotechnology and considering the potential risks and benefits. Within Australia, the emergence of the commercial application of nanotechnology is being monitored by several Australian Government agencies including the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS). The focus of NICNAS is to consider the potential application of nanotechnology in relation to safety and regulation of industrial chemicals.

NICNAS is working within the whole of government framework. An Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) has been established lead by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, with relevant Australian Government agencies responsible for managing other aspects of nanotechnology.

NICNAS is also an active participant in a Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) working group under the IDC that will examine issues such as the possible toxicity risks for human health and the environment.

NICNAS is aware of research developments related to nanotechnology and nanomaterials occurring around the world. At present, NICNAS is aware of the majority of industrial nanomaterials used in Australia are at volumes of less than ten tonnes per year, and used in the following applications: surface coatings, cosmetics, printing, water treatment, catalysts, domestic products (results release in Jan 2007 from a Call for Information).

NICNAS is proactively gathering information from all relevant sources including through the Australian Government IDC and from industry, NGOs, scientific researchers, and our regulatory partner agencies around the world. NICNAS has received one enquiry regarding the introduction of a new industrial nanomaterial (silver for use in personal care soaps).

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NICNSA is also working internationally on nanotechnology, actively contributing to work of the OECD Working Party on Manufactured Nanomaterials, to promote international cooperation for responsible research, development and commercialisation of nanotechnology

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**Attachment A: Article from the Australian Newspaper**

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