Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2007

Dr. David A. Schwartz
Director
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
P.O. Box 12233
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2233

Dear Dr. Schwartz:

The mission of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) is to "prevent disease and improve human health by using environmental sciences to understand human biology and human disease." Other federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, use NIEHS information when establishing public health safeguards for communities across the nation. We are writing to request a briefing regarding allegations that the role of contractor personnel at a NIEHS center on chemicals and reproductive risk may be impairing this important mission.

Publicly available information suggests that important elements of the work of NIEHS's Center for the Evaluation of Risks to Human Reproduction (CERHR) are managed by a private consulting firm called Sciences International, Inc. We are concerned about potential conflicts of interest that may be raised if a contractor plays a role in determining who will sit on the Center's committees that assess the reproductive and developmental risks of environmental agents. Sciences International reports that approximately half of its clients are "private-sector," but does not identify these clients.

In fact, Sciences International may have specific conflicts of interest with regard to an upcoming assessment of the health risks of a chemical called bisphenol-A. The primary Sciences International employee managing CERHR reportedly has co-authored a paper with an employee of Dow Chemical, a manufacturer of bisphenol-A. In addition, Sciences International reportedly was involved in an earlier effort by a manufacturer to challenge risk-mitigation measures related to a different chemical. In a letter sent this morning, the Environmental Working Group contends that the document on bisphenol-A that was prepared by Sciences International and that will inform the CERHR panel's decision displays a pro-industry bias by downplaying the chemical's documented adverse effects.

The NIEHS plays a crucial role in understanding and mitigating the impacts of chemicals on human health, and we are concerned that the extensive use of contractors at CERHR may undermine this goal. We therefore request a briefing on the activities of Sciences International at CERHR, the company's involvement in the current review of bisphenol-A, and potential or actual conflicts of interest presented by this arrangement.

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We would appreciate receiving this briefing before the March 5, 2007, meeting of the panel on bisphenol-A. Please contact Jeff Baran, at (202) 225-4407, of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee or Erik Olson, at (202) 224-8832, of the Senate Environment and Public Works staff to schedule the briefing.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
House Oversight and
Government Reform Committee

Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Senate Environment and
Public Works Committee

Enclosure