

OPENING STATEMENT

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***HEARING: Environmental and Safety Impacts of Nanotechnology:
What Research is Needed?***

November 17, 2005

I want to join Chairman Boehlert in welcoming everyone to this morning's hearing. There is no question that this Committee understands the importance of nanotechnology and recognizes the strong justification for a robust Federal research investment.

The Committee has held several hearings to evaluate the promise of nanotechnology. And in 2003, the Committee took the lead in passing the 21st Century Nanotechnology Research and Development Act, which is now funded at over \$1 billion per year.

However, from the outset, we also recognized that risks may arise from this technology, and that is the subject of today's hearing. Some research has suggested that nanoparticles could cause human health problems and may damage aquatic life. But research in this area is in its infancy, and the tools are not available to identify and assess the risks associated with nanomaterials.

Yet, many products containing nanoparticles are already on the market - in cosmetics, clothing and other products. Some estimate their presence in as many as 700 products. Maybe there are no harmful effects. We simply do not have the necessary information to know if there are or if there aren't.

What is clear is that commercialization of the technology is outpacing the development of science-based policies to assess and guard against adverse environmental, health and safety consequences. The horse is already out of the gate.

Thus, prudence suggests the need for urgency in having the science of health and environmental implications catch up to, or even better surpass, the pace of commercialization.

We need to develop the tools and procedures to determine if nanomaterials are harmful, and if so, what specific controls may be needed.

From its beginnings, the National Nanotechnology Initiative has included funding for research to address environment, health and safety aspects of the technology. But funding levels have been fairly anemic.

At present, total funding in this area is under \$40 million for the \$1.1 billion initiative, and the majority of that funding is concentrated at the National Science Foundation. While I applaud NSF's efforts, I am concerned that other key agencies remain minor players. For example, related funding at the Environmental Protection Agency is only \$4 million.

The main questions I have today are:

- is environment, health and safety research directed toward the most important priorities,
- is it funded at an appropriate level, and
- do all communities of interest have a voice in establishing the research goals and directions?

I also encourage any suggestions our witnesses may have on ways to improve the environment, health and safety component of the National Nanotechnology Initiative.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing. I look forward to the insights that this expert panel will provide today.