

## Opening Statement

**Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN)**  
**Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science**

### ***Hearing: Research on Environmental and Safety Impacts of Nanotechnology – What are the Federal Agencies Doing?***

**September 21, 2006**

This morning's hearing is a follow-on to our hearing of last November that addressed the health and environmental risks that may arise from applications of nanotechnology. That hearing clarified several important points and raised new issues.

All the previous witnesses, who represented government, industry, and non-government organizations, stressed that nanotechnology will advance faster and receive public support if the environmental, health, and safety implications of the technology are understood.

To that end, all witnesses stressed the need for the interagency National Nanotechnology Initiative to include a prioritized and adequately funded component focused on environmental, health, and safety issues.

The outside witnesses either recommended that the NNI increase funding for EHS research or expressed frustration that they were unable to determine exactly what EHS research was being supported by the NNI.

And finally, the Administration witness at the hearing told us an interagency working group was developing a coordinated approach to nanotechnology research on EHS. This process would identify and prioritize research needs to assess the risks associated with engineered nanomaterials and be sufficiently detailed to guide researchers and research managers in making project-level decisions.

We were told the research plan would be available by the spring of 2006, but it has only just appeared. And, unfortunately it is not the prioritized research plan we expected to see.

Mr. Chairman, I frankly do not understand the inability of the responsible agencies to produce a research plan with well-defined priorities and resource requirements. It is the first step for developing proposed research programs and associated budgets for FY 2008.

It is now late in the budget planning cycle for FY 2008. What then will the agencies use to guide their selection of EHS research projects and to determine their budget requirements? In the absence of a prioritized EHS research plan, I see no way to initiate a carefully-crafted set of research programs that are relevant to the needs of the companies that will be developing and using nanomaterials and to the needs of the agencies charged with oversight of EHS aspects of nanotechnology.

As we learned from the previous hearing, applications of nanomaterials are rapidly advancing. Consumer products employing nanomaterials are now on the market. The Wilson Center's Nanotechnology Project has identified at least 200 such products, many of which are actually designed to be ingested.

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. But here we are today, nearly a year after our initial nanotechnology hearing on health and environmental risks with little sign of forward progress in focusing the interagency research effort. I want to hear from our witnesses why progress has been so slow.

We need to consider whether the interagency process under the NNI can be made to function to meet environmental, health and safety needs – and, if not, we must look for an alternative approach without further delay.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that is the key issue the Committee should address relative to EHS research, and I look forward to the discussion today.