



August 8, 2007

50 Medical Center Way
San Francisco, CA
94143-0942
tel: 415/476-1300
fax: 415/476-0581

To: UCSF Campus Community

From: Robert Eaton, Director
Office of Environmental Health and Safety

Re: Laser Printers in the Media

A recent story on laser printer particle emissions was given wide attention in the media last week. The Office of Environmental Health & Safety (OEHS) has drafted this assessment and asks that you forward this on to others in your department.

Last week several newspapers, radio and television programs reported on an Australian research study that measured small airborne particles emitted by common laser printers. The researchers studied particle levels in an office environment and from their results concluded that the primary particulate source was laser printers. The study also examined the number of particles produced by three common office printers.

This study did not examine the health effects associated with the particles measured in the office. In addition, the study makes no quantitative comparison to other sources of particle emissions that could have also contributed to the total particle count.

An unfortunate, and perhaps irresponsible, comparison to cigarette smoke particles made in some media stories has expectedly caused some alarm. While cigarette smoke consists of similarly sized particles, there are also hundreds of different chemicals in cigarette smoke, many of them with known health effects. The chemical composition of the particles described in the printer study remains unclear and the study did not examine any health effects associated with exposure to the printer particles.

Particles such as those studied by the Australian group are not specific to printers and are produced from several sources including furnaces, fires, cooking, candles, toaster ovens, combustion engines, and many others. The scientific community is still in the process of evaluating the potential health impacts associated with exposure to such particles. Agencies such as the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that have established extensive guidelines on indoor air quality are closely monitoring these types of studies.

As no tie to health impacts has yet been determined, neither federal nor state health agencies have established rules limiting exposures to the particles measured by this study. Given this current information, there is no reason to suggest that immediate action in the workplace is required.

If you have specific concerns or questions regarding this issue please contact EH&S at 476-1300. EH&S will keep you posted if we learn of related information that could be helpful.