

News Release . . .

United States Senate

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Wyden Praises Nature Nanotechnology Article

Senator Says that “Safe Handling of Nanotechnology” Article Offers a Much Needed Framework for Considering Nanotechnology’s Environmental, Health, And Safety Implications

WASHINGTON – United States Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) issued the following statement in response to the publication of “Safe Handling of Nanotechnology” in *Nature*, which sets forth a research framework for considering the environmental, health, and safety aspects of nanotechnology:

“What’s great about this *Nature* article is that it provides a much-needed environmental, health, and safety research framework. Its suggested approach presents a solid foundation for developing a short-, mid-, and long-term research strategy.

“The tools and research base that the article’s authors propose are essential for evaluating nanomaterials risks and addressing these critical issues head on. I was also pleased to see that the article recognizes the need to develop strategies (e.g., applying green chemistry to the development of nanomaterials) to identify and produce safer nanomaterials as the need arises.

“I urge the federal government to take a hard look at this important article because now is time to act; there is no time for delay. The nation has taken huge strides towards harnessing the promise of nanotechnology. But the nation has also come to a crossroads that could shape nanotechnology’s future. The crossroads I am referring to revolves around nanotechnology and environmental, health, and safety issues.

“At this point, most environmental, health, and safety aspects of nanotechnology mainly involve unanswered questions. The efforts made to answer these questions and how those answers are addressed by the federal government, industry, academic researchers, activists, and the public will have dramatic impact on the success – or failure – of this nascent technology.

“Tackle the environmental, health, and safety issues properly and America reaps nanotechnology’s economic and social benefits for years to come. Mishandle or ignore these questions and public confidence in nanotechnology may disappear. So will the enormous opportunity that nanotechnology presents.

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Page 2/Nanotechnology.

“Already, elements of the public are concerned by perceived risks associated with nanotechnology. And so is business. Some companies are standing on the sidelines and refusing to pursue nanotechnology because of the uncertainty – and perceived potential liability – associated with the sector. Some investors are becoming less inclined to fund nanotechnology firms. At least one insurer has refused to provide coverage to nanotech companies.

“Despite the attention – and concern – of industry, academia, and the public, the federal government has failed to show strong leadership in setting the environmental, health, and safety research agenda. Understandably, the issue is complex – nanotechnology is a cross-cutting discipline with products and processes being developed in every field imaginable. Multiple federal agencies with multiple priorities have oversight of the environmental, health, and safety elements of nanotechnology. But these are not excuses; if anything, the complexity of the task should serve to motivate everyone involved to proceed ahead in a thorough and thoughtful manner. It’s time for the federal government to finally adopt an environmental, health, and safety research agenda like the one proposed in this article, and start answering the many questions that exist.

“I am certain that nanotechnology holds huge promise. In medicine. In energy. In computer processing. In so many areas. But unless environmental, health, and safety issues are addressed in a way that fosters public understanding and support for nanotechnology, that potential is in jeopardy. I, for one, am unwilling to let that happen.

“As a US Senator interested and invested in the success and safety of nanotechnology, I will be watching closely in the coming weeks, months and years to ensure that the federal government, in cooperation with all interested parties, steps up and addresses these environmental, health, and safety issues head on.”

Senator Wyden was a co-author of 21st Century Nanotechnology Research & Development Act.

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