

BAD TASTE

THE DISTURBING TRUTH ABOUT THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION'S ENDORSEMENT OF FOOD IRRADIATION

Summary of a special report
by Public Citizen and GRACE

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION is the most important and influential agency of its kind on the planet.

Created in 1948 by the United Nations, the WHO's mission nothing short of preserving the health of the Earth's population – “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

In 1999, the WHO announced that any food could be “treated” with any dose of ionizing radiation and still be safe for human consumption.

Even though this radiation – in the form of gamma rays emanating from radioactive cobalt-60 or cesium-137, or near-speed-of-light electrons fired by linear accelerators – could be as high as the equivalent of several billion chest x-rays, a WHO report proclaimed that irradiating food “does not result in any toxicological hazard.”

In the process of assessing the safety and wholesomeness of irradiated foods, did the World Health Organization fulfill its mission to preserve the health of the Earth's population?

How could irradiated foods be declared safe and wholesome if animals fed irradiated foods in experiments dating back 50 years have suffered dozens of health problems – including premature death, mutations and other genetic abnormalities, fetal death and other reproductive problems, immune system disorders, fatal internal bleeding, organ damage, tumors, stunted growth and nutritional deficiencies?

Has the WHO's assessment been made independent of efforts to further the legalization, commercialization and consumer acceptance of irradiated foods?

Has the WHO's analysis been corrupted by efforts to resuscitate the nuclear industry?

AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF THE WHO's 40-plus-year involvement in assessing the safety of irradiated foods reveals the following:

- The WHO has played a role in abandoning the original research agenda it co-drafted in 1961 – which urged experiments into whether irradiated foods are toxic or radioactive; whether they could cause cancer, mutations or nutritional deficiencies; and whether the scientific expertise even existed to answer these fundamental questions.

- The WHO has handed the ultimate power to research the safety of irradiated foods to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the world's leading proponent of nuclear technology. The IAEA has published 19 of the 29 major international reports on food irradiation since 1962.

- With the WHO assuming a backseat role, The IAEA is leading a campaign to further the legalization, commercialization and consumer acceptance of irradiated foods worldwide. One IAEA publication states: “We must confer with experts in the various fields of advertising and psychology to put the public at ease. Any word or statement containing the word ‘radiation’ or ‘radiate’ should not be required on the label.”

- The WHO has played a role in dismissing and misrepresenting evidence suggesting that irradiated foods may not be safe for human consumption. The WHO, along with the IAEA and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), took research that revealed health problems in animals that ate irradiated foods, and stated that the research actually revealed no health problems that could be attributed to irradiation. Additionally, such research was outright omitted from key reports.

- The WHO has played a role in dismissing recent evidence that unique chemical byproducts formed in irradiated foods – cyclobutanones – promoted the cancer-forming process, spawned tumors and lesions, and caused genetic damage in rats; and caused genetic damage in human cells.

By assuming, in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary, that irradiated foods are safe for human consumption, the World Health Organization has taken a leap of faith that could threaten the health of millions of people living in more than 50 countries where these products can legally be sold.

DUE TO THE IRREGULARITIES in the process by which the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization have endorsed food irradiation, Public Citizen and GRACE make these recommendations:

- The WHO, IAEA and FAO should promptly place a moratorium on any further

recommendations to expand food irradiation in any fashion.

- The WHO, IAEA and FAO should promptly withdraw its endorsement of irradiation for all foods at any dose – no matter how high. The agencies should inform all member nations of this action and recommend that they not proceed with food irradiation of any kind.

The WHO has dismissed evidence that chemical byproducts called cyclobutanones, which are formed in many irradiated foods, promoted the cancer-forming process and tumor growth in rats; and caused genetic damage in human cells.

- The WHO should promptly conduct, commission or otherwise foster published, peer-reviewed research into the core safety and wholesomeness issues at the first major FAO/IAEA/WHO food irradiation conference held in Brussels in 1961. Research should also be conducted into the toxicity of

cyclobutanones, and the radiation-induced formation and increased concentration of chemicals known or suspected to cause cancer, birth defects and other health problems.

- The 1959 agreement giving the IAEA “the primary responsibility” to research and develop nuclear technologies, and to require the WHO to consult with the IAEA on overlapping projects, should be dissolved.

- The United Nations should promptly appoint an independent panel of experts from the fields of toxicology, food science, radiation chemistry, nutrition and other relevant fields to conduct a comprehensive review into the activities of the WHO, IAEA and FAO related to food irradiation. This panel should also investigate whether the IAEA's role in analyzing the safety of irradiated foods has corrupted this process. All of the proceedings should be open to the public



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