

FREE RADICALS – making the connection between the environment and breast cancer

WHO ARE THE FREE RADICALS?

Free Radicals is an independent autonomous group campaigning for radical change in thinking and action around breast cancer.

Free Radicals are women:

- who are concerned about the increasing incidence of breast cancer in the UK,
- who view breast cancer as a largely preventable disease,
- who accept the general evidence for causal links between breast cancer and a chemically polluted environment,
- who believe there are no safe levels for the government-approved carcinogens and hormone-mimicking chemicals being released into our environment,
- who are working for the primary prevention of breast cancer.

FREE RADICALS AIM TO:

Proclaim the public ‘right to know’ about introduced health hazards in our environment.

Produce information about products which threaten our health and their safe alternatives.

Tackle the issue at source by challenging individuals and institutions responsible for the protection of public health.

FREE RADICALS WILL CAMPAIGN FOR:

1. Better public health protection policies and practices
2. The individual and collective accountability of policy and decision makers in public health related areas, for the effects of their policies and decisions on public health outcomes (including an ever-escalating national health budget).
3. Open public access to information about all chemicals registered for use in the UK.
4. Improved licensing procedures for new chemicals.
5. Public representation in the licensing process.
6. The banning of chemicals known or suspected of being carcinogenic and/or disruptive to the endocrine (hormonal) system in humans.

Breast tissue is the most sensitive human tissue after foetal tissue. The sensitivity of breast tissue makes women exceptionally vulnerable to health risks posed by numerous environmental factors e.g. radiation, synthetic hormones and pesticide residues in food products.

Most worrying in terms of the rising incidence of breast cancer, is our exposure to carcinogenic and endocrine disruptors in the form of chemicals which are used in increasing numbers and combinations in the materials and products which support our everyday lives e.g. pesticides, weed control products, insect repellents, flea treatments for pets, cleaning agents, and many non-organic fresh and processed food products.

Regardless of where we live and work, we are inadvertently inhaling, ingesting or absorbing chemicals from an enormous range of foods, consumer products and materials.

Released into the environment from so many different sources, these chemicals form a 'cocktail' which our bodies must contend with daily.

Any decisions we make and actions we take to protect our health are undermined by our involuntary exposure to breast cancer related health hazards in our homes and workplaces as well as in public and recreational spaces. In fact everywhere we live, work and play!

Official procedures for the assessment, licensing and regulation of chemicals for agricultural, industrial, manufacturing or domestic use in the UK are undertaken by various agencies of government and industry.

- Each chemical is assessed on an individual basis.
- None are assessed in the combinations in which they occur in the real environment or for their effects on human health.
- Many are known or suspected carcinogens and/or endocrine disruptors.
- The vast number of products derived from registered chemicals carry no warnings about potential short and long-term risks to human health.
- Hidden as they are from public scrutiny, lacking in public participation, public disclosure and accountability, regulatory procedures for chemicals in the UK are undeniably covert in style, and profoundly unethical.
- They neither serve the public interest nor protect our health.
- They do however serve and protect the interests of commerce, intensive agriculture and industry.

Regarded as a fundamental right in a democratic society, the 'right to know' is clearly not available to consumers and citizens in the UK. Without knowledge of potential threats to our health from consumer goods, we are ill equipped to make informed decisions about our lives and our health. As consumers we can change this situation:

- > by demanding higher standards of safety and quality in all products
- > by demanding detailed labelling for all consumer products
- > by becoming informed enough to reduce our exposure levels
- > by choosing safer products

Once we become informed we can choose not to buy products which have the potential to harm us.

FREE RADICALS – breaking the connection between the environment and breast cancer

While working primarily to shift the focus of the national breast cancer agenda from screening, treatment and control of the disease, to one of primary prevention, Free Radicals continue to support the efforts being made around the country to improve the medical and psycho-social management of the disease for the benefit of all women with breast cancer.

Definitions:

free radicals – destructive molecules produced by our bodies as a by-product of normal metabolic processes.

carcinogenic – cancer promoting

endocrine or hormone disruptor – a synthetic chemical substance with the capacity to imitate and therefore disrupt the normal function of hormones in the body.