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EPA Updates Science Assessment for Dioxins / Air emissions of dioxins have decreased by 90 percent since the 1980s

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WASHINGTON – Today the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized its non-cancer science assessment for dioxins, which was last reviewed in the 1980s. Dioxins are toxic chemicals that naturally exist in the environment and can be released into the environment through forest fires, backyard burning of trash, certain industrial activities, and residue from past commercial burning of waste. Today's findings show that generally, over a person's lifetime, current exposure to dioxins does not pose a significant health risk.

Over the past two decades EPA has worked to reduce emissions from all of the major industrial sources of dioxins. As a result of efforts by EPA, state governments and industry, known and measurable air emissions of dioxins in the United States have been reduced by 90 percent from 1987 levels. The largest remaining source of dioxin emissions is backyard burning of household trash.

Most Americans have low-level exposure to dioxins. Non-cancer effects of exposure to large amounts of dioxin include chloracne, developmental and reproductive effects, damage to the immune system, interference with hormones, skin rashes, skin discoloration, excessive body hair, and possibly mild liver damage.

EPA has identified many known sources of dioxins. Working with other federal partners, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, EPA has taken steps to address dioxin. This includes supporting research on dioxin exposure and effects; assessing dioxin human health risks; measuring dioxin levels in the environment, our diet and in our bodies; and reducing exposure to dioxin.

The non-cancer health assessment for dioxin released today could be considered in a range of agency activities, from establishing cleanup levels at Superfund sites, to reviewing the dioxin drinking water standard as part of EPA's regularly scheduled review process, to evaluating whether additional Clean Air Act limits on dioxin emissions are warranted.

More information on dioxin: <http://www.epa.gov/dioxin/>