



Campaign to Include Women, Children, and Future Generations in Environmental Health Standards (October 19, 2006)

Statement of Jeanne Rizzo, R.N.
Executive Director, Breast Cancer Fund

Today, the Breast Cancer Fund and our colleagues are asking President Bush to strengthen public health protection for the most vulnerable Americans.

Breast cancer incidence rates have continued to trend upward since the 1940s. More than one in every eight women will be diagnosed in her lifetime. How are we protecting women in our country and how are we protecting our children from exposures that lead to adult disease?

We're not.

We're not protecting women and children because for too long we have relied on a "one size fits all" approach. By using Reference Man to essentially represent all of us, that is exactly what we've been doing.

There is a considerable and growing body of evidence indicates that exposures to radiation and synthetic chemicals are contributing to increased rates of breast cancer in the U.S. We know that ionizing radiation is the best established cause of breast cancer in women. And we also know that cancer mortality risks for women are 37.5% higher than for men for the same radiation exposure.

How can we say we are protecting women in our country when we use a "one size fits all" reference setting approach? We know that women are more vulnerable to radiation. We need to shift the focus away from the Reference Man to protect them.

There is also evidence that suggests that exposures to radiation and chemicals during critical developmental windows—*in utero*, childhood, and adolescence—could lead to breast cancer later in life. The risk of developing cancer from radiation exposure is an incredible 86% higher for a young girl than a young boy. It's clear that young girls are more vulnerable to chemical and radiation exposures and yet we continue to use the "one size fits all" approach. We need to protect our girls now to prevent breast cancer and other adult disease.

Unfortunately, women are also exposed to radiation through medical treatments. While we know that ionizing radiation is the best established breast carcinogen, the bitter irony is that the best detection and treatment options for breast cancer still involve deliberate exposure of women to radiation, therefore increasing their risk of developing breast cancer. By using Reference Man to represent each of us, these additional exposures to radiation are not counted or factored into protections. A woman's experience is different than a man's and health protections need to reflect that.

As our letter to the President reads, we are counting on the President's leadership to make it a central principle of federal rules and regulations to protect those who are most susceptible to radiation and toxic chemicals. If we change our safety references to especially and specifically protect women and girls, we will spend less time, money and heartache treating diseases caused by environmental exposures.