Published on *The National Law Review* https://natlawreview.com

Talc Safety Subject of New Independent Scientific Expert Panel Led by FDA

Article By:

Jeffrey Kluger

A panel of scientific experts met last week at the request of federal regulators to discuss the potential side effects of talc and cancer risks to consumers. Specifically, the independent panel discussed the safety of talc in food, drug, and cosmetic products.

The event, led by FDA Commissioner Dr. Martin Makary, marked the start of a broader effort to publicly evaluate controversial ingredients tied to serious health risks. Talc is a soft mineral used in baby powder, cosmetics, and pharmaceutical tablets. Talc is often mined near asbestos, a known carcinogen that can cause mesothelioma, asbestosis, and lung cancer, among other serious diseases. Talc litigation is rampant across the country, with plaintiffs' lawyers and experts arguing that talc products can become contaminated with asbestos fibers, ultimately leading to disease and death.

In addition to these contamination risks, some researchers have raised concerns that even asbestos-free talc may pose health hazards. In litigation, plaintiffs' experts point to studies that suggest talc particles, when applied to the genital area, can migrate into the body and may increase the risk of ovarian cancer through chronic inflammation. These concerns were amplified in June 2024, when the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified talc as "probably carcinogenic" to humans, even when it is asbestos-free.

There have been thousands of lawsuits filed against talc companies, suppliers, and manufacturers, each raising similar allegations that various talc-based products were often contaminated with asbestos, causing plaintiffs to develop mesothelioma, ovarian cancer, and other injuries after applying and breathing in the powder.

Panel Promotes Shift Away From Talc Use

During the roundtable discussion, the panel of researchers, pathologists, and toxicologists reached a consensus that manufacturers "should move away from using talc" based on a risk-benefit analysis. Ultimately, the panelists agreed there are safer, reasonably priced alternatives to talcum powder that should be used instead (e.g. cornstarch).

Still, the panel underscored the need for continued research on the potential side effects of talc, not

only on the cancer risks but also on the broader impact of exposure. While the panel does not have authority to implement regulatory changes itself, its expert findings carry significant weight in shaping future FDA policy decisions.

Talcum Powder Lawsuits

The panel's recommendations echo concerns that have been central to a growing number of lawsuits filed over the past decade by plaintiffs who developed mesothelioma, ovarian cancer, and other serious injuries after using talc-based products. These lawsuits allege that manufacturers and suppliers failed to warn consumers about the risks associated with talc, including potential asbestos contamination.

Tens of thousands of lawsuits have been filed in the last decade by individuals who allege they developed mesothelioma, ovarian cancer, and other diseases from using talc-based products. In response, several manufacturers have pledged to remove talc from their products, although the companies and their experts have denied that use of talc-based products pose health risks.

With a recent mix of plaintiff and defense verdicts in talc litigation across the country, it will be interesting to see what impact, if any, the FDA's recommendations have. Presumably, plaintiffs' counsel will point to the FDA's shift away from talc use as evidence of its risks, while defense counsel and their experts will cite the FDA's risk-benefit analysis – instead of new definitive scientific findings and studies.

National Law Review, Volume XV, Number 149