

## **Death in a popcorn bag**

The FDA has its feathers ruffled over the imaginary dangers of side-stream smoke, but it wouldn't know a real threat if it popped them in the face -- or if it was popping in their microwave.

That's right, the comforting aroma of buttery popcorn that has a way of filling every room in your house should be anything but comforting -- because it could be killing you.

It's not the popcorn itself that's the problem -- it's the "buttery taste." It might taste like butter, but it's nothing close to real thing -- not by a long shot. The flavoring comes from a chemical called diacetyl.

You'll find diacetyl in dairy products like milk, cheese, and yes, even butter. But it's a far cry from the synthetic version that goes straight from the lab to your microwave popcorn. And to make matters worse, when diacetyl is exposed to heat it releases a vapor that can cause irreversible damage to your lungs.

The popcorn industry has kept the dangers of diacetyl hush hush as much as possible, but they've known for years that the chemical risks the lives of popcorn plant workers who breathe in the fumes on a consistent basis. Hundreds of workers have had their lungs damaged or destroyed completely, and many have filed suit against the popcorn companies.

But now we're finding out that plant workers aren't the only ones in danger. Cases of the same lung condition are showing up in consumers who chow down on microwave popcorn on a regular basis. And it's no wonder -- turns out that after you pop a bag of microwave popcorn, the levels of diacetyl in your house are eerily similar to those found in the popcorn plants. Now that the public is beginning to sit up and take notice, big name popcorn companies are finally starting to look for an alternative to diacetyl. Well, it's about time. I guess it's no skin off their backs to lose a few employees here and there -- but to lose sales is serious business. Still, I wouldn't take any comfort in their promise of a safer substitute -- especially after they kept the dangers of diacetyl under wraps for so long.

Popping mainstream's myths,

William Campbell Douglass II, M.D.