CRITICS IN MINORITY AT HEARING

Naderite Ties Saccharin to Weight Gain

WASHINGTON — (UPI) — Saccharin, under attack as a suspected cause of bladder cancer in test animals, may actually cause humans to gain weight rather than lose it, according to one researcher.

Dr. Sidney Wolfe, head of Ralph Nader's health research group, offered that opinion to a House health subcommittee reviewing the Food and Drug Administration's proposed ban on the artificial sweetener.

WOLFE BACKED the FDA's decision, and said "no scientific study shows saccharin helps to lose weight."

"Animal studies show weight gain caused by saccharin fed at doses comparable to human intake," he said. "The mechanism of this increased hunger with saccharin may well be its demonstrated ability to abnormally lower blood sugar which can induce hunger."

But saccharin critics appeared to be in the minority during Monday's first day of hearings into the situation.

The acting director of the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Guy R. Newell, said, "Based on human data we do not believe saccharin is a potent carcinogen for humans, if it is one at all."

THERE ARE 650,000 new cases of cancer in the United States each year, 30,000 of which are bladder cancer—the kind of malignancy found in the Canadian saccharin tests on rats.

Smoking, not saccharin, he said, is probably the main cause of that type of cancer.

At most, saccharin could be causing 600 to 700 new cases of bladder cancer each year, but "we have no evidence that that has in fact occurred," he said, and the NCI does not see it "as an acute health problem."

Newell also said there are about 37,000 deaths from diabetes each year, and while those persons would be expected to be heavy saccharin users, there is no evidence that bladder cancer is a major cause of death among that segment of the population.

DR. SHERWIN GARDNER, acting FDA commissioner, told the hearing, however, that the Canadian studies "confirm old suspicions about saccharin rather than raise new questions."

He offered the subcommittee four possible alternatives ranging from no change in the law to complete repeal of the Delaney amendment which forbids permitting cancer-causing compounds in the food supply.

He said the FDA would decide later what specific recommendation to make, and expressed doubt that giving saccharin drug status—either over-the-counter or prescription—would answer the problem.

DR. RICHARD BATES, FDA associate commissioner for science, said the Canadian study also indicated that rats fed the equivalent amount of saccharin found in 10 bottles of diet soda a day would develop, at most, 4 cases of bladder cancer per 1,000 test animals.

The rate would be 4 in 10,000, he added, if the dosage were one bottle a day.

Asked if that would translate into a "public health disaster" if the findings applied to humans, he said it would.