

Europe spends nearly twice as much as US on nanotech risk research

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A new analysis by the Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies (PEN) indicates that European nations are investing nearly twice as much as the U.S. in research primarily aimed at addressing the potential risks of nanotechnology. The analysis also highlights a substantial over-inflation of the federal government's nanotechnology risk-research investment figures for the U.S.

The new PEN assessment of nanotechnology risk-relevant projects identified by the federal government's National Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI) for fiscal year 2006 found that only \$13 million was invested in projects highly relevant to addressing possible risks.

Over the same time period, the PEN analysis found European countries invested nearly \$24 million in projects with the primary aim of addressing nanotechnology risks.

PEN evaluated research projects listed in the NNI research strategy—released in February 2008 but without specifics regarding the annual project budget or the applicability of each project to assessing potential hazards—by their relevance to addressing current and future nanotechnology risks. Research was classified according to whether it was highly relevant to addressing potential environment, health or safety hazards, substantially relevant, having some relevance, or was only marginally relevant.

By collecting individual project budget data from publicly available

sources, an estimate was made of funding levels for 2006. The assessment found 62 federally-funded projects that were highly relevant to understanding nanotechnology risk, with an estimated annual budget of \$13 million.

In contrast, the federal government estimates \$37.7 million was invested in highly relevant research in fiscal year 2006. According to PEN Chief Science Advisor Andrew Maynard, “It appears the U.S. is guilty of wishful thinking in its assessment of research that will lead to the development of safe nanotechnologies. It is trying to substitute research that might inform science’s general understanding of possible nanotechnology risks for research that is focused on getting answers to direct questions being asked today—what makes a nanomaterial potentially harmful, how can it be used safely, and what happens when it is eventually disposed” Both the U.S. government figure and the results of the PEN assessment show that less than 3 percent of the \$1.4 billion federal nanotechnology research budget was spent on environment, health and safety research.”

Draft legislation proposed by U.S. House of Representatives Science Committee Chair Bart Gordon (D-TN) would amend the NNI act to include a minimum 10 percent mandate for the nanotechnology federal research and development budget devoted to EHS research in the future, amounting to approximately \$150 million annually.

Source: Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies

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