

# Nanotech safety high on Congress' priority list

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The House Science and Technology Committee today introduced legislation that highlights the growing attention on Capitol Hill to the need to strengthen federal efforts to learn more about the potential environmental, health and safety (EHS) risks posed by engineered nanomaterials. Nanotechnology is an emerging technology that promises to usher in the next Industrial Revolution and is the focus of an annual \$1.5 billion federal research investment.

The new bill (H.R. 554) is almost identical to legislation that passed the House last year with overwhelming bi-partisan support by a vote of 407 to 6. The Senate was expected to mark up similar legislation, but lawmakers ran out of time during the session.

Introduction of the bill comes only months after former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) official J. Clarence (Terry) Davies authored a report that makes a series of recommendations for improving federal risk research and oversight of engineered nanomaterials at EPA, the Food and Drug Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The report published by the Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies (PEN), Nanotechnology Oversight: An Agenda for the Next Administration, offers a host of proposals for how Congress, federal agencies and the White House can improve oversight of engineered nanomaterials; see: [www.nanotechproject.org/publications/archive/pen13/](http://www.nanotechproject.org/publications/archive/pen13/) .

"We know that when materials are developed at the nanoscale that they

pose potential risks that do not appear at the macroscale," says David Rejeski, PEN's director. "This new bill shows that lawmakers recognize both nanotechnology's enormous promise and possible problems. The legislation reflects mounting Congressional interest in understanding potential risks in order to protect the public and to encourage safe commercial development and investment."

The House bill comes only weeks after a National Research Council (NRC) panel issued a highly critical report describing serious shortfalls in the Bush administration's strategy to better understand the EHS risks of nanotechnology and to effectively manage those potential risks.

The NRC report, Review of the Federal Strategy for Nanotechnology-Related Environmental, Health and Safety Research, calls for a significantly revamped national strategic plan that will minimize potential risks so that innovation will flourish and society will reap nanotechnology's benefits in areas like medicine, energy, transportation and communications.

Source: Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies

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