

## Bad News is **Sticking** to Teflon™

In July 2005, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* took a very hard look at a soft EPA report on a controversial chemical used to make Teflon, a nonstick coating for cookware

The newspapers reported on conflicting conclusions reached by the EPA and the scientific advisory board that reports to the EPA.

The scientific advisory board reviewed the EPA's questionable draft risk assessment of perfluorooctanoic acid—PFOA, also known as C-8—which is used in the manufacturing of Teflon. The EPA found only “suggestive evidence” of potential human carcinogenicity based on animal studies.

It seems that the advisory board concluded that PFOA is “likely” to be carcinogenic in humans and that the EPA needs to perform cancer risk assessments for tumors found in mice and rats.

Richard Wiles, senior vice president for the Environmental Working Group (EWG), is hoping the review will put pressure on the EPA to conduct human health risk assessments for a number of cancers including liver, breast, pancreatic, and testicular. Wiles also wants the EPA to investigate PFOA's possibly toxic effects on immune system health.

Animal studies using mice and rats have raised alarms about the safety of Teflon. And the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands, of pet birds have heightened that alarm.

From the 1800s to as late as 1986, canaries were used in mining operations to detect the presence of fatal gases like methane and carbon monoxide. The avian low-tech, easy-to-read “monitor” became the early warning signal for danger below ground. If a canary stopped singing or began swaying on its perch before tumbling off and even dying, the miners would beat a hasty retreat from the mine. The colorful little songbirds protected the lives of miners from colorless and odorless gases that sometimes developed underground.

This may come as a surprise to many of our readers, but canaries are dying in kitchens from “Teflon Toxicosis.” The EWG advises readers that “Avian veterinarians have known for decades that Teflon-coated and other nonstick cookware can produce fumes that are highly toxic to birds.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Teflon Kills Birds” Canaries in the Kitchen: Teflon Toxicosis is deadly to pet birds. Are we at risk?, Environmental Working Group. 2005  
[www.ewg.org/reports/toxicteflon/toxictemps.php](http://www.ewg.org/reports/toxicteflon/toxictemps.php)

In the *Chicago Tribune* in 1987 and 1995, pet owners were warned that hundreds of birds are killed by fumes and particles from Teflon-coated products every year.<sup>2</sup>

WearEver cookware now includes a warning on labels about pet birds and nonstick cookware. The following is from the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section on the company's website:

"Can items covered with nonstick emit fumes that are toxic to birds? Yes. If nonstick pans are left unattended and extremely overheated the fumes can be deadly to birds. Never keep your bird in or near the kitchen and always provide good ventilation. Birds have very sensitive respiratory systems."

DuPont, maker of Teflon, notes on its website: "With regard to birds, veterinary experts recommend keeping pet birds away from cooking and cleaning fumes. These fumes can be hazardous to birds because they have small and very sensitive respiratory systems. This includes fumes from many household cleaning products, fumes from overheated cooking fats, and fumes **from overheated nonstick cookware.**" (Emphasis added. To view the entire statement, go to [www.dupont.com](http://www.dupont.com) then search for "cookware safety.")

DuPont maintains that only *overheated* Teflon-coated products will cause bird deaths. Unfortunately the evidence suggests otherwise. EWG lists the following ordinary cooking scenarios:

- A new Teflon-lined Amana oven was used to bake biscuits at 325° F; all of the owner's baby parrots died.
- Four stovetop burners, underlined with Teflon-coated drip pans, were preheated in preparation for Thanksgiving dinner; 14 birds died within fifteen minutes.
- A nonstick cookie sheet was placed under the oven broiler to catch drippings; 107 chicks died.
- The self-cleaning function on the oven was used; a \$2,000 bird died.<sup>3</sup>

The question is, if these fumes are deadly for birds, what are they doing to humans?

### Peer-reviewed Studies

The Environmental Working Group analyzed sixteen peer-reviewed studies of experiments conducted over the past fifty

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Daniels, "Health debate: nonstick drip pans catch heat" *Chicago Tribune*, March 29, 1987. Steve Dale, "Fatal fumes: while people may not be in danger, the kitchen is no place for pet birds." *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> "Teflon Kills Birds." EWG.

years that showed heated Teflon decomposes to fifteen types of toxic gases and particles. Many of these studies were conducted by DuPont's own scientists who were investigating heated Teflon in the '50s when DuPont workers were developing polymer fume fever that can lead to the sometimes fatal condition of pulmonary edema.

EWG states that at normal temperatures of kitchen appliances, Teflon chemicals break apart to form:

- Two chemicals linked to cancer or tumors in laboratory studies (PFOA and IFE).
- Two chemical warfare agents (PFIB and MFA) and a chemical analog of WWII nerve gas phosgene (COF<sub>2</sub>).
- Two chemicals that are potent global warming gases (PFB and CF<sub>4</sub>).
- Four gaseous chemicals and some components of the particulate matter that are highly persistent environmental pollutants that likely never break down in the environment: TFA, PFOA, CF<sub>4</sub>, PFB, and the perfluorinated particulate alkalines.<sup>4</sup>

#### EPA: Not Worried?

If the EPA releases its final study of PFOA continuing to state only "suggestive" evidence that the chemical is a potential human carcinogen, no further studies are warranted. And while the EWG claims that toxic fumes are released from Teflon cookware at 325° F or a medium flame, DuPont says this happens only at 660°.

The *New York Times* reported on July 2, 2005, that "a class action suit filed last week against DuPont in several states, including New York, charges that Teflon releases PFOA under normal cooking use and that the company did not warn consumers about its dangers."<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the warning to bird owners, DuPont also warns consumers on its website that "in cases where the nonstick coating is grossly overheated, fumes may produce temporary, flu-like symptoms"<sup>6</sup>—and this warning is for humans, not birds.

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<sup>4</sup> "DuPont has known for 50 years." Canaries in the Kitchen: Teflon Toxicosis is deadly to pet birds. Are we at risk?, Environmental Working Group. 2005. [www.ewg.org/reports/toxicteflon/teflonoffgas.php](http://www.ewg.org/reports/toxicteflon/teflonoffgas.php)

<sup>5</sup> Marian Burros, "Is There an Extra Ingredient in Nonstick Pans?", *New York Times*, July 27, 2005

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.teflon.com/Teflon/downloads/pdf/teflon\\_faq.pdf](http://www.teflon.com/Teflon/downloads/pdf/teflon_faq.pdf)

Maybe it's time to take a cue from nineteenth century miners. Only instead of home cooks beating a hasty retreat from the kitchen at the first sign of a dying canary perhaps all nonstick Teflon cookware should be escorted out!

Bring convenience, health, and gourmet performance to your home!

Here are ten reasons why our titanium pans should be in your kitchen.

1. Heat-resistant glass lids allow monitoring of the cooking process
2. Handles, lids, and knobs are oven proof up to 500° F (260° C).
3. Cook with little or no oil, fat, or water.
4. Handles don't have screws or rivets, so they will never fall off or loosen.
5. Titanium layer gives off indirect heat to assure a perfect cooking atmosphere.
6. The durable titanium coating is nonstick
7. Meats are tastier, juicier, and more tender.
8. Hand-cast, aluminum base ensures optimum heat distribution and retention, cutting cooking time in half.
9. Food retains maximum nutrients, enzymes and flavors.
10. The nonporous titanium layer is 100 percent effective in preventing aluminum from absorbing into food.

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