

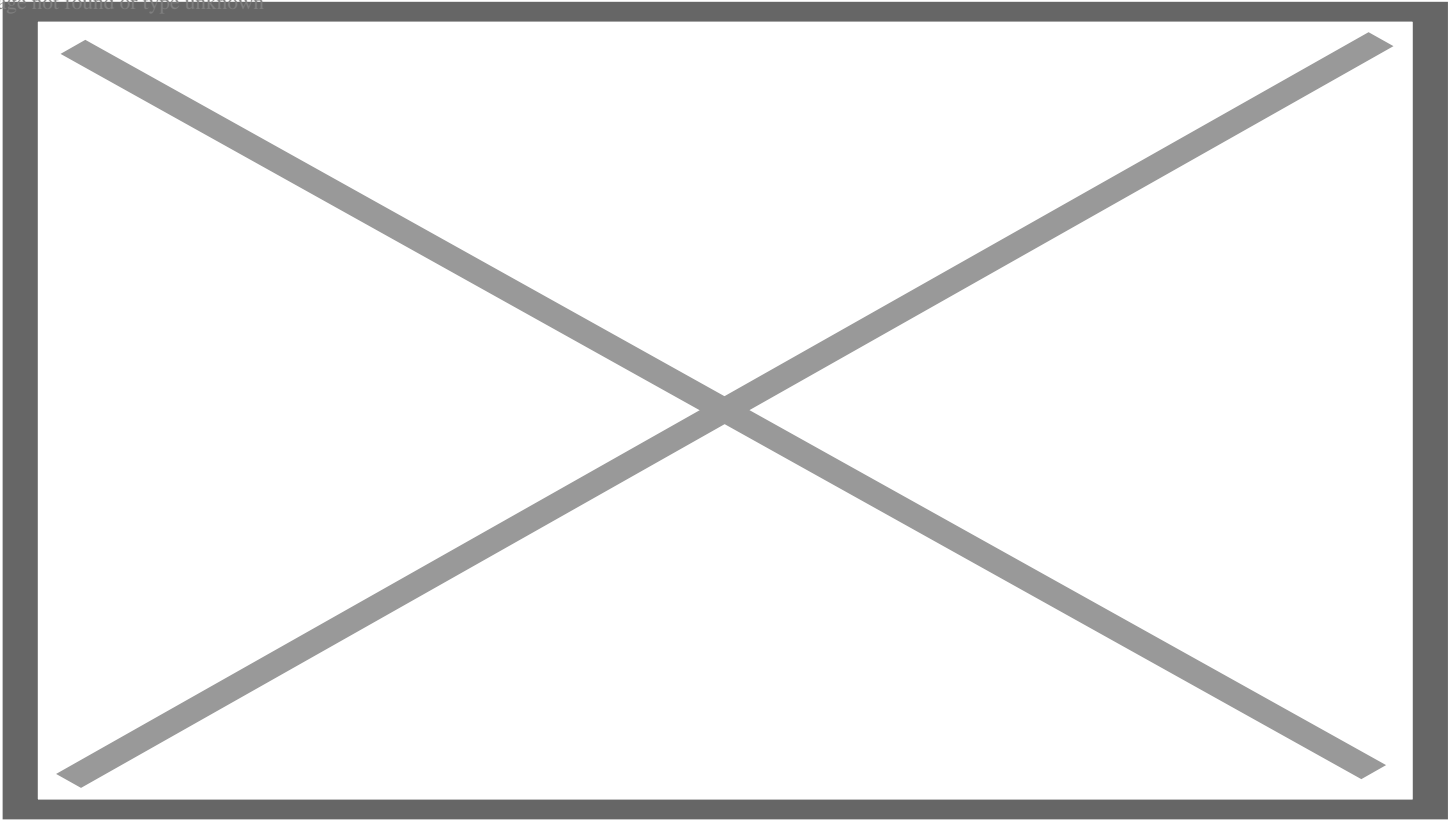
Viewpoint: Can the International Agency for Research on Cancer be trusted to dispassionately assess potential dangers of aspartame when its key evaluator claims to know the answer in advance?

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a United Nations epidemiology group headquartered in France, could be in ethical hot water again [over the claim by a Ramazzini Institute leader that seems to know in advance that IARC will consider aspartame a carcinogen](#) – a designation which leads to automatic warning labels or even bans in places like California, which under Proposition 65 turned over its science to IARC last century.

“I am sure that even for aspartame, present in about six thousand consumer products, the evaluation of the new results will lead to confirmation of its dangerousness,” said Ramazzini Institute scientific director Fiorella Belpoggi.

Nothing dramatic there, hard-left anti-science activists like Ramazzini Institute have had it in for the product since they found out President George Bush Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld once ran the company that got it to market.(1) The problem for IARC credibility is that Belpoggi hand-picked the member of Ramazzini placed on the IARC Working Group supposedly doing a neutral analysis of the popular artificial sweetener.

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Fiorella Belpoggi, [saying cell phones cause cancer.](#)

Ramazzini has been in a war on aspartame for a long time. There is nothing objective, and therefore scientific, about their work. [A recent paper](#) in *Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology* noted concern because [the papers Ramazzini scholars intentionally chose to make their claims used the same technique anti-GMO activists like Seralini use](#); animals prone to getting natural cancer (e.g. Sprague-Dawley), without controlling for that or even randomizing them. Animals were allowed to live too long, so long it would be an ethical violation in the United States, to help insure they got cancer. Then they declared it was the aspartame that caused the cancer.

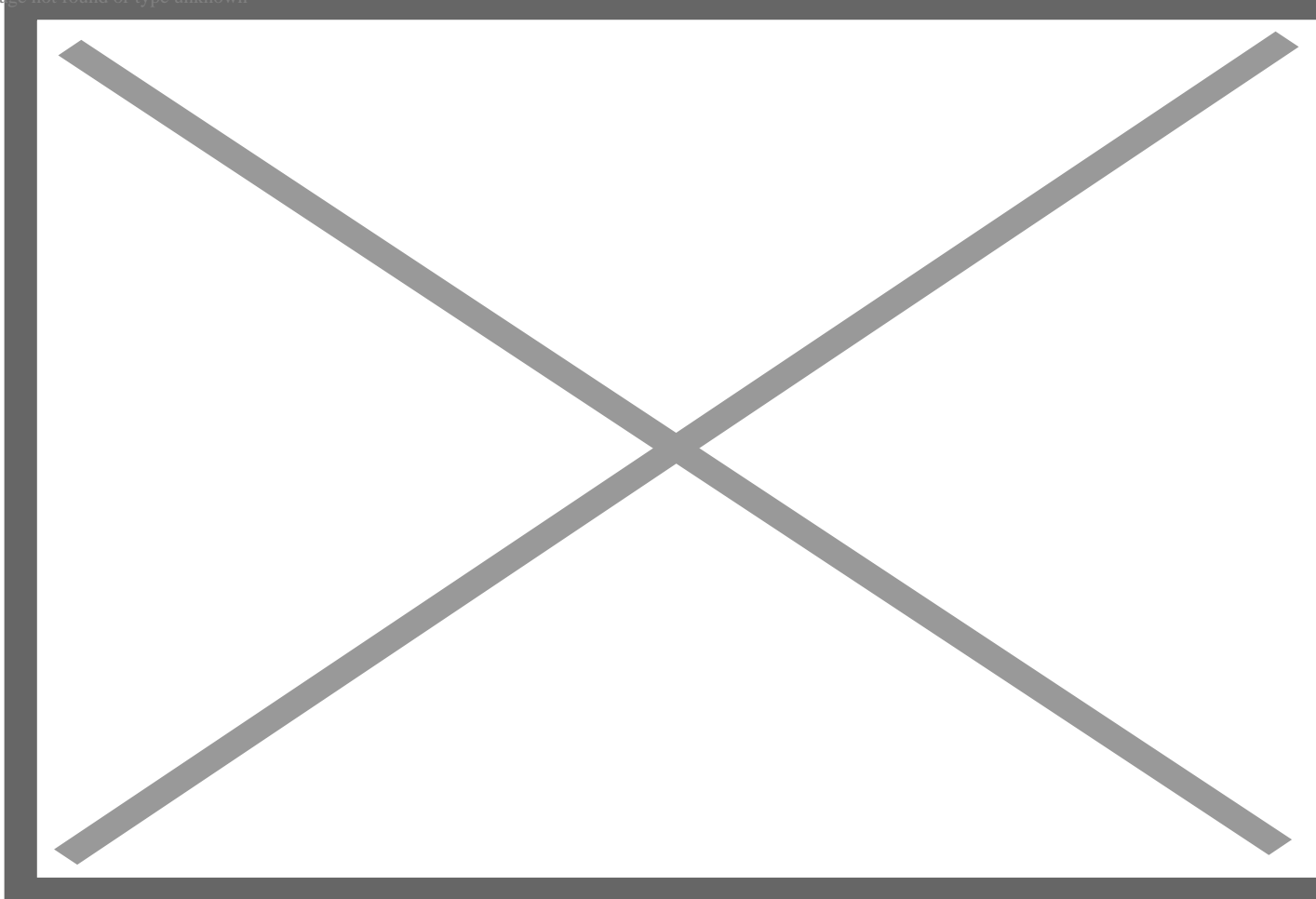
The senior author on the paper that got so much criticism for the same kind of methodology that got Seralini retracted is the same Fiorella Belpoggi of Ramazzini Institute who suggests the result of the IARC working group is already determined. If so, why bother with the pretense of selection bias and secret meetings, who not go right to the vote on 'how harmful' aspartame is and send out media kits which talk about "risk"?

It is a common joke in scientific circles that IARC picks compounds their members want to ban and then examine rows and columns of statistics until they find a reason. Their classifications are ridiculous unless you believe DDT, Ginkgo biloba have aloe vera are the same risk of making you ill.(2) Their credibility outside environmental lawyers and progressive journalists and politicians is low while Ramazzini credibility is even worse; down near Robert F. Kennedy when it comes to vaccines and cell phones. Only a zealot or

someone paid to believe actually says they are legitimate.

Yet Belpoggi may be too confident that sympathetic journalists, like those who try to seriously cover Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen" list each year, will lead the charge – and then next go after the cell phones she also believes causes cancer. She may have made an error hinting the result is 'pre-rolled.' When the anti-GMO movement was in full-swing, I began to note how hypocritical it was that 2,000 mutagenesis derived plants were created using less precise chemical and radiation baths and yet not only in common use but labeled "organic." I showed that was because the world leader in mutagenesis, BASF, was a European company while superior GMO technology was American. To neutral people, it was clear that the war on GMOs was economic geopolitics, not public health – it was the European government funding NGOs to undermine the US and protect European corporations.

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The U.N. World Health Organization and the IARC was once highly esteemed. Credit: United States Mission Geneva via CC-BY-2.0

The American anti-science left ignored that but Europeans did not. Since most of them are government-funded, no donors to worry about, they began to call for bans on mutagenesis as well. European journalists could not cover that up.

If this new hypocrisy, that IARC Working Group members on aspartame were chosen because they wanted to ban it, turns out to be the case, it will be difficult for journalists like Licia Granello, ghost writer of Belpoggi's book on how statistics will save the planet, and who has probably already written drafts calling for bans on aspartame, to seem objective if the results appeared to be determined before the working group met.

There is no way to know how legitimate the result is, and that is the problem with IARC. Instead of assuming the best in scholars, like we do with scientists, we have to assume the worst about IARC epidemiologists based on experience. You don't get on an IARC Working Group unless you are 'reliable' when it comes to their agenda. Ramazzini, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and more are vetting epidemiologists using an ideological litmus test – you will need to suggest you believe aspartame and cell phones and GMOs cause cancer. Once vetted by an allied group – the former head of NIEHS was a proud member of Ramazzini while she was still supposedly running an American group without any ethics violations – then they are safe choices to get into IARC.

Since 2009, IARC has not just been suspect, they have often been disreputable. They had a chance to reset when Chris Wild stepped down, but instead of getting back to the first principles that made them the source for real epidemiological insight from the 1960s until the 2000s, they replaced him with someone so inside the anti-chemical clique she is literally married to the oldest of the IARC Old Guard.

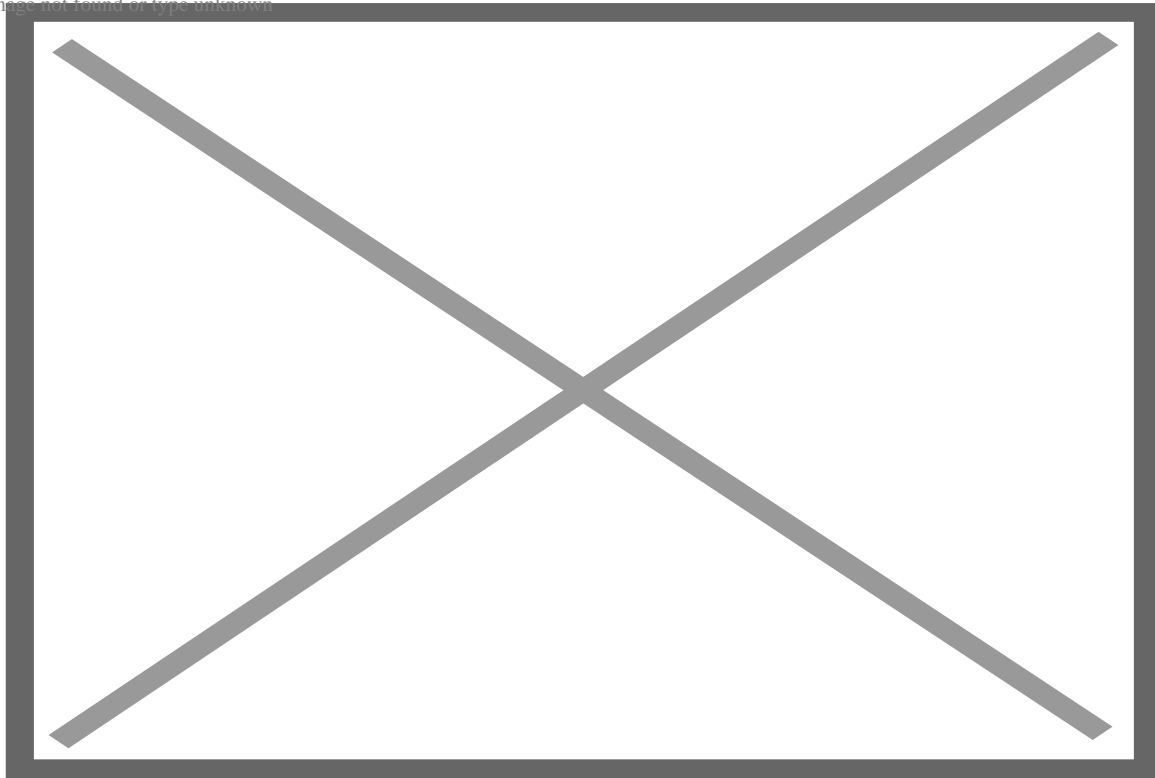
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Under Wild, selection criteria were modified so only people who matched their agenda could gain entrance. They banned anyone who has ever consulted for "industry" – which means they banned the very best in their fields – while keeping anyone actively still being paid by environmental groups. Including environmental groups suing over products IARC is studying. They have no issue with their members signing contracts to become highly-paid expert witnesses on compounds they studied even before the results are finalized.

Once they choose members without any regard for competence or ethics, they use a secret sauce so members of Working Groups are even weighing in on their own papers.

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It's hard not to imagine a conflict of interest being possible. Credit: Pixabay via CC-BY-SA-4.0

This is all bad, but it would be just wacky environmentalism if states like California had not turned over their decision-making on cancer warning labels in the 1980s, when IARC was still legitimate. Since then, nearly every product in a California business has a cancer warning label, including products in cancer wards in hospitals.

If IARC is allowed to run unchecked over science this time, it will mean environmental lawyers have thousands of new products to sue and settle over, and that will help no one except their yacht dealers.

Notes:

1. Corporate conspiracies abound that he somehow forced FDA career employees who happen to be 90 percent Democrats to do his bidding. None of it makes sense but conspiracies don't need to make sense, they need to make money, and for groups like Sourcewatch, targeting Republicans in the name of science has always been their best fundraising tool.
2. Of course not, but IARC does not use "dose" in its findings, only "hazard", so to their epidemiologists if a paper uses 10,000 doses of a chemical to cause cancer, it is the same as if only one is in use. That is why DDT and ginkgo biloba are the same carcinogen hazard. It is stupid and pointless and in a modern climate where IARC ran out of real carcinogens to find decades ago, a weapon against science rather than for public health.

Hank Campbell founded Science 2.0 in 2006, and writes for USA Today, Wall Street Journal, CNN, and more. His first book, *Science Left Behind*, was the #1 bestseller on Amazon for environmental policy books. Follow Hank on Twitter [@HankCampbell](#)

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