FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 26, 2006

Scientists Urge Labor Secretary to Protect Workers from Diacetyl

(Washington, DC, July 26, 2006) -- A group of 42 top scientists and occupational health experts sent a letter to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao today, urging the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an emergency temporary standard to protect workers from diacetyl, a chemical used in artificial butter flavoring. The letter was sent in strong support for a petition submitted to OSHA by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

"Study after study has shown that breathing artificial butter flavor destroys workers' lungs. We know how to prevent this terrible disease, but OSHA refuses to act," said Dr. David Michaels of the Project on Scientific Knowledge and Public Policy (SKAPP) at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services.

Dozens of workers around the country have developed the debilitating lung disease *bronchiolitis obliterans*, also known as "popcorn workers lung," and other respiratory illnesses from exposure to vapors from artificial butter flavor used in microwave popcorn and many other food products.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conducted several studies that confirmed the link between occupational exposure to artificial butter flavoring and lung diseases, and in 2000 they issued recommendations for protecting workers from this hazard. OSHA, which has the authority to regulate the industry, has failed to turn these findings and recommendations into regulation that would protect workers in facilities using diacetyl.

At least one worker has died after developing occupational lung disease, and several workers who were employed at popcorn plants are on lung transplant lists. "It's time for action," said Jackie Nowell, UFCW Safety & Health Director. "We will not let food processing workers continue to be the canaries in the coal mine while waiting for the industry to regulate itself."

UFCW has also nominated artificial butter flavoring for long-term testing under the National Toxicology Program.

EPA Also Slow to Act

SKAPP is also concerned about diacetyl's effects on consumers. More than two years have passed since the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) completed a study on the chemicals released when consumers pop and open packages of microwave popcorn, but the agency has said they will not release the study until internal and industry reviews are completed.

Today, SKAPP also sent a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson asking the agency to release the results of a study it conducted on consumer exposure to artificial butter flavor vapors.

"EPA should let consumers know what its study found, so they can either feel at ease about making microwave popcorn or take appropriate precautions," Michaels said. "They certainly

should not be showing their study to industry before the public has a chance to view the findings."

Related Links:
Popcorn Workers Lung Case Study: Background on diacetyl studies, NIOSH investigation, and OSHA's and EPA's inadequate responses
Scientists' letter to Secretary Chao
UFCW and IBT petition to Secretary Chao
SKAPP's letter to Administrator Johnson
UFCW's petition to the National Toxicology Program
Resources: Studies and other documents related to diacetyl
News coverage

SKAPP is an initiative of scholars who are examining the application of scientific evidence in the legal and regulatory arenas. For more information about SKAPP, go to www.DefendingScience.org.