

## **N-9 Lube Dead, but N-9 condoms live on (Bay Area Reporter)**

Ed Walsh

*October 15, 2002* -- In a huge victory for activists and a testament to the power of public pressure, all lubricant manufacturers have now agreed to stop making lube with the spermicide nonoxynol-9. The product, which has been shown to significantly increase the risk of HIV transmission, will become extinct once existing supplies are sold.

The last manufacturer still making N-9 lube told the Bay Area Reporter last week that it will stop. Westridge Laboratories, the producer of the I-D Plus brand, joins the makers of Aqua Lube, ForPlay, KY, and Wet who have pulled N-9 from their products

Medical anthropologist and sexologist, Dr. Clark Taylor, praised the manufacturers for voluntarily stopping N-9 lube production. Taylor has crusaded against N-9 along with Global Campaign for Microbicides, a Washington, D. C. based coalition of over 85 scientists and public health advocacy groups. Taylor also had high praise for the B. A. R. in its recent series of reports on N-9.

"With one fell swoop of the pen, you did what I couldn't do in two years," said Taylor.

After the B. A. R.'s series of reports documenting that N-9 lube continues to be sold throughout San Francisco, even in stores that market to gay men, the owner of the Phantom and Smoke Plus stores in the Castro voluntarily pulled N-9 lube from his shelves. Imad Bitar said the his primary concern is the safety of his customers. Walgreens also decided to pull N-9 lube from its Castro store and said it is considering pulling it from all its stores.

Although manufacturers will stop making N-9 lube, at least three companies will continue to make condoms laced with N-9. Those N-9 condoms are manufactured under the brand names of LifeStyles, Durex, and Trojans. Taylor pointed out that the pre-lubed condoms contain a higher concentration of N-9 than was found in lubricants, about 2-6%. N-9 lubricants contained anywhere from one-tenth-of-one-percent to one-percent N-9. The one exception was KY Plus lubricant, which contained 3% N-9, according to the Global Campaign.

Taylor said most of the lubricant in pre-lubed condoms rubs off on the anal sphincter, one of the most critical areas for infection. Global Campaign spokeswoman Lori Heise said that although N-9 lubricants were her highest concern, N-9 lubricated condoms are also of concern. Heise noted that if the condom breaks, it could subject the user to a greater danger and subsequent sex acts would also be more risky after the anus is already damaged.

N-9 was first added to condoms after laboratory tests showed it killed HIV in the test tube. Subsequent studies have shown that it has the opposite effect because it strips away the protective epithelial cells in the anus of its users, increasing the risk of HIV transmission. In its lengthy report on N-9, the World Health Organization concluded that N-9 condoms "should not be promoted." WHO said N-9 condoms do not provide its users with any additional contraceptive benefit and do not prevent any diseases.

Heise told the B. A. R. that condom makers are reluctant to stop making some of their product line with N-9 because it represents about 40% of their business.

A representative of LifeStyles condoms, Carol Carozza, told the B. A. R. that her company continues to make the product because it's legal and has been approved by the FDA. Before hanging up on the B. A. R., Carozza parroted that any questions about the safety and effectiveness of N-9 condoms should be directed to the FDA. When asked how she would

respond to activists who say that the product her company makes is killing people, Carozza again refused to answer and said the B. A. R. should contact the FDA.

The FDA did not respond to the B. A. R.'s e-mail or phone message by press time. Representatives of the companies that make Durex and Trojans also did not return the B. A. R.'s calls and e-mails by press time.

In the wake of the B. A. R.'s series of stories on the N-9 danger, San Francisco Supervisor Mark Leno asked the city attorney to draft legislation banning N-9 lube in San Francisco. Leno's aid, Bob Hartnagel told the B. A. R. that he was very pleased that manufacturers responded to public pressure and voluntarily stopped making N-9 lube. He said he would discuss with Leno whether the manufacturers' decision essentially makes their proposal moot or whether they should consider proposing legislation that would ban N-9 condoms.

The New N-9?

Heise said she was very concerned after recently reading a label for the ForPlay lubricant. She said that product contained two surfactants, or detergents called benzalkonium chloride (BZK) and chlorhexidine. She explained that those ingredients, like other surfactants, break down cell membranes. She said there was no reason for a company to put those ingredients in lubricants except to give the consumer a false impression that the product is better than another lubricants without it.

Heise said she planned to discuss the matter with Robin Ogilvie, the owner of Trimensa, the company that makes ForPlay. Heise strongly advised consumers to avoid lubricants that list benzalkonium chloride or chlorhexidine on the label

Ogilvie did not return the B. A. R.'s calls by press time.