

SESSION III

RISKS OF CONTAMINATED AIR AND DRINKING WATER

CHAIRMAN:

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## INTRODUCTION TO SESSION III

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This morning we will be dealing with the risk of inhaled contaminants and contaminated drinking water. Probably the session should be renamed somewhat to reflect the emphasis on air pollution. Problems of environmental pollution, particularly air pollution, represent a major challenge to risk assessment. Many of us, after studying air pollution over the years, feel uncertain about the risks to the public health that it represents. What are the important pollutants? What is the evidence? What do we know about causality? How effective have our efforts been to measure and control? What are we doing to assess the risks associated with air pollutants or environmental pollutants in general?

We can accept the fact that there is a problem, but I think most of us feel that we don't understand its dimensions nor its importance. Human studies, both epidemiologic and experimental, have clearly revealed features that will be paramount in risk assessment. We are dealing with effects of low doses. Despite the fact that acute air pollution episodes brought the hazard to our attention, the real problem must be regarded as one of large numbers of people continuously exposed at low levels. We are also dealing with the thorny issue of the synergism of mixtures. Finally, we are dealing with policies which have a serious impact on every level of society. The costs of doing something about air pollution are convincingly large and impressive. They tax our ingenuity to make as few mistakes as possible.

Out distinguished speakers this morning are here to tell us what is being done and how it's being done, and some of its limitations and successes.