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CONSUMER REPORTS SAYS MORE TESTING, REGULATION NEEDED FOR NANOTECHNOLOGY

CR investigates potential benefits, possible health and environmental risks of new technology

July 2007 Issue

YONKERS, NY — [Nanotechnology](#) promises to be the most important innovation since electricity and the internal combustion engine. But some applications might pose substantial risks to human health and the environment, according to the July issue of *Consumer Reports*.

Nanomaterials are already being used in consumer products such as car wax, computer chips, and sunscreen and about \$2.6 trillion worth of goods worldwide are expected to use nanotech by 2014, up from \$50 billion in 2006.

But the risks of nanotechnology have been largely unexplored, and government and industry monitoring has been minimal. Moreover, consumers have been left in the dark, since manufacturers are not required to disclose the presence of nanomaterials in their labeling.

Nanotechnology involves creating new materials or reducing the particles in standard materials to sizes as small as a nanometer, or about 100,000 times smaller than the width of a human hair. At this size, the characteristics of materials change, carbon becomes 100 times stronger than steel, aluminum turns highly explosive, and gold melts at room temperature, for example. New characteristics such as these can be used to bring positive changes to consumer products. But in some cases, they may make benign materials toxic and toxic ones more hazardous.

The July issue also features a report on sunscreens, involving *CR*'s tests of 19 products at outside labs. Eight of them listed zinc oxide or titanium dioxide on the label, which could indicate the presence of nanoparticles. A test of those 8 sunscreens found that all contained nanoparticles, but only one disclosed the presence of nano-zinc oxide. And the tests revealed no correlation between effectiveness and the presence of those ingredients.

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