

DuPont, Now in the Frying Pan – By Amy Cortese – TEFLON has been hugely successful for DuPont, which over the last half-century has made the material almost ubiquitous, putting it not just on the frying pans but also on carpets, fast food packaging, clothing, eyeglasses and electrical wires - even the fabric roofs covering football stadiums.

Now DuPont has to worry that Teflon and the materials used to make it have perhaps become a bit too ubiquitous. Teflon constituents have found their way into rivers, soil, wild animals and humans, the company, government environmental officials and others say. **Evidence suggests that some of the materials, known to cause cancer and other problems in animals, may be making people sick.**

While it remains one of DuPont's most valuable assets, Teflon has also become a potentially huge liability. The Environmental Protection Agency filed a complaint last month **charging the company with withholding evidence** of its own health and environmental concerns about an important chemical used to manufacture Teflon. That would be a violation of federal environmental law, compounded by the possibility that **DuPont covered up the evidence for two decades.**

DuPont contends that it met its legal reporting obligations, and said that it plans to file a formal response this week.

If an E.P.A. administrative judge does not agree, the agency could fine the company up to \$25,000 a day from the time DuPont learned of potential problems with the chemical two decades ago until Jan 30, 1997, when the agency's fines were raised, and \$27,500 a day since then. The total penalty could reach \$300 million. The agency is also investigating whether the suspect chemical, a detergent like substance called perfluorooctanoic acid, is harmful to human health, and how it has become so pervasive in the environment. **The chemical which is more commonly known as PFOA or C-8,** for the number of carbon atoms in its molecular structure has turned up in the blood of more than 90 percent of Americans, according to samples taken from blood banks by the 3M Company beginning in the mid-90's. Until it got out of the business in 2000, 3M was the biggest supplier of PFOA. DuPont promptly announced it would begin making the substance itself.

The E.P.A. is auditing 3M to determine if there were any civil violations of environmental law involving its chemically related products, Cynthia Bergman, a spokeswoman for the agency, said. **The E.P.A.'s action on July 8 prompted the Chinese government to begin its own study on the safety of Teflon, and some stores there pulled Teflon-coated pans from their shelves,** the government-run China Daily newspaper reported.

SOME people who live in or near Parkersburg, W.Va., where DuPont has manufactured Teflon for 50 years, are not waiting for some studies. **Thousands of them have joined in a class-action suit** filed in Wood County, W.Va., Circuit Court **against the chemical maker, which they charge knowingly contaminated the air, land and water** around the plant for decades without informing the community. The chemical has been found in the public drinking water at levels exceeding a longtime internal guideline considered safe by DuPont. The trial is scheduled to begin next month.