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Methanol Institute Statement on EPA Placing Hold on Methanol Health Assessment

(Arlington, VA, June 15, 2010) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today announced it was placing on hold further action for its health assessments of methanol, MTBE, ETBE and acrylonitrile pending additional review of research conducted by the Ramazzini Institute of Italy. In January, the EPA released its draft health assessment of methanol under the Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) proposing to classify methanol as a “likely human carcinogen” based largely on data from the Ramazzini Institute. A team of pathologists from the National Toxicology Program (NTP) recently visited Italy and completed a partial review of the Ramazzini Institute’s methanol study and reported that further reviews are necessary to support or refute the overall conclusions of the study.

“It is reassuring that EPA is undertaking a thorough review of the integrity of these underlying studies by the Ramazzini Institute and their possible use for health assessment purposes,” said John Floren, chairman of the Methanol Institute’s (MI) Board of Directors and Senior Vice President of the Methanex Corporation. “Clearly, from the NTP review of just a few of the Ramazzini methanol study’s tissue slides, the results reported by the laboratory do not reflect an accurate diagnosis of the slides. This NTP report confirms the Methanol Institute’s belief that before the Ramazzini study on methanol is proposed for use in any health assessment, a full ‘pathology working group’ review is absolutely necessary. MI looks forward to working productively with the EPA as it continues its methanol review.”

The Methanol Institute submitted detailed written comments to the EPA on March 15th raising significant concerns regarding the quality of data from the Ramazzini Institute that was used by the agency in its proposed cancer classification. Previously, the Methanol Institute had urged the EPA to conduct a full pathology working group review of all of the tissue slides from the Ramazzini methanol study. The recent review of the Ramazzini methanol study by a team of pathologists from the NTP confirms the views of other authoritative bodies and outside expert pathologists that the colony of rats used by the Italian lab is suffering from chronic respiratory disease that is being misinterpreted by the researchers as cancerous tumors. Further, the NTP researchers questioned the methodology of the Ramazzini lab in allowing animals to die spontaneously rather than being sacrificed after a specific period of time as is the uniform practice for other cancer researchers. The NTP pathologist noted significant autolysis of some tissues that made it difficult to provide an accurate diagnosis.

The Methanol Institute serves as the trade association for the global methanol industry.