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Nanomaterials Under Study by the E.P.A.

By [CORNELIA DEAN](#)

The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) detailed its plans on Tuesday for research into the possible health and environmental risks of nanomaterials, tiny substances that are finding growing use in products like sunscreens and industrial adhesives.

[The document](#), issued in draft form in June, calls for work to identify sources of nanomaterials, which can measure as little as perhaps one-10,000th the width of a human hair. Research will also center on how they move in the environment, the problems they might cause for people, animals and plants, and how these problems could be avoided or mitigated.

[The federal National Nanotechnology Initiative](#) is charged with coordinating research by various agencies on the issue. But in [a highly critical report](#) last year, the [National Academy of Sciences](#) dismissed its effort as inadequate.

Little is known about whether substances engineered at the nano scale persist and accumulate in the environment in unusual and potentially harmful ways. In August, a coalition of groups including [Friends of the Earth](#) and [Consumers Union](#) issued a [report](#) urging people to avoid sunscreens containing nano-forms of zinc oxide, saying their risks were unknown.

On the other hand, "the universe of possible health impacts" could be reduced as scientists learn more, said [Andrew D. Maynard](#), chief science adviser for the [Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies](#) at the [Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars](#). He described the strategy mapped out by the E.P.A. as "a very good document."

Jeffrey T. Morris, program director for nanotechnology at the E.P.A., said the agency was cooperating with other organizations, including some that fall under the National Nanotechnology Initiative's umbrella and groups abroad including the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development](#), a group of industrialized nations.

Mr. Morris said the agency and researchers in Japan, for example, were sharing work on carbon nanotubes, cylindrical nanostructures used in a variety of products, including tennis rackets.

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