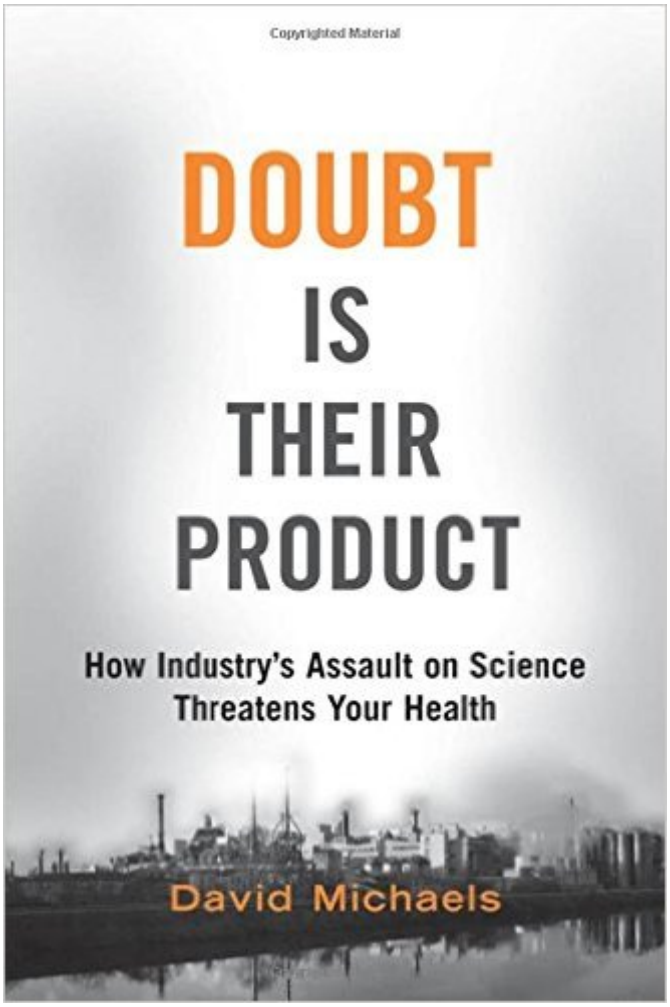
Doubt Is Their Product: How Industry's Assault On Science Threatens Your Health



Synopsis

"Doubt is our product," a cigarette executive once observed, "since it is the best means of competing with the ’body of fact’ that exists in the minds of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy." In this eye-opening expose, David Michaels reveals how the tobacco industry’s duplicitous tactics spawned a multimillion dollar industry that is dismantling public health safeguards. Product defense consultants, he argues, have increasingly skewed the scientific literature, manufactured and magnified scientific uncertainty, and influenced policy decisions to the advantage of polluters and the manufacturers of dangerous products. To keep the public confused about the hazards posed by global warming, second-hand smoke, asbestos, lead, plastics, and many other toxic materials, industry executives have hired unscrupulous scientists and lobbyists to dispute scientific evidence about health risks. In doing so, they have not only delayed action on specific hazards, but they have constructed barriers to make it harder for lawmakers, government agencies, and courts to respond to future threats. The Orwellian strategy of dismissing research conducted by the scientific community as "junk science" and elevating science conducted by product defense specialists to "sound science" status also creates confusion about the very nature of scientific inquiry and undermines the public’s confidence in science’s ability to address public health and environmental concerns Such reckless practices have long existed, but Michaels argues that the Bush administration deepened the dysfunction by virtually handing over regulatory agencies to the very corporate powers whose products and behavior they are charged with overseeing. In Doubt Is Their Product Michaels proves, beyond a doubt, that our regulatory system has been broken. He offers concrete, workable suggestions for how it can be restored by taking the politics out of science and ensuring that concern for public safety, rather than private profits, guides our regulatory policy. Named one of the best Sci-Tech books of 2008 by Library Journal!

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Customer Reviews

If we believe David Michaels, industry charlatans all learned from the tobacco industry 50 years ago. The industries that rely on doubt have been blossoming ever since: beryllium (did you know that there was a beryllium industry? I did not), asbestos, and popcorn, among others.Yes, popcorn. Were you aware that there is a condition called "popcorn lung" (officially bronchiolitis obliterans)? I was not. It’s called that because one of the main ways to contract it is by working in a factory that manufactures one of the ingredients -- namely diacetyl -- for the butter flavoring in popcorn. Every time you open a steaming bag of butter-flavored microwave popcorn, you are inhaling a bit of this chemical. The more of it you eat, the more likely you are to contract a devastating lung ailment. (And this isn’t the sort of disease that you’d only get by eating an implausibly large quantity of popcorn. Real popcorn consumers have actually acquired it.)The agency responsible for protecting workers from this sort of hazard is OSHA. The one responsible for protecting food consumers is the FDA. This division of labor comes in for some well-deserved scorn in Doubt Is Their Product; it has left the government fairly impotent to respond to threats against the public health. This book could be read alongside Marion Nestle’s Food Politics and What To Eat as a single thread about the assault on helpful government regulation.In their nonstop fight against that sort of regulation, companies have pulled out all the stops to inject systematic doubt into the public discussion. The most pernicious of these, it seems to me, is the creation of sham peer-reviewed journals. Peer review is a negative process: if you can’t pass peer review, your ideas are unlikely to have merit (though there are cases, says Michaels, where brilliant scientists -- future Nobelists -- have been denied peer approval). Passing peer review doesn’t mean that your ideas are any good. Something similar applies to the references you give a potential employer: if you can’t find anyone in the world to say something nice about you, that is a warning sign. If three people will say good things about you, that doesn’t mean that you’re going to be a good employee. The public doesn’t understand this distinction, and doesn’t know which journals have any respect within the field. So regulated industries have dutifully gone and created journals that will say whatever they’re paid to say -- just as the creationists have done. The news reports then compile, say, a "list of scientists opposing the mainstream scientific assessment of global warming" as though scientific consensus were decided

by majority vote among equals.If there’s the slightest bit of doubt about, say, the cause of a disease, industry pounces and insists that more research is necessary. More research will always be necessary: science never attains the truth, only better and better approximations to the truth. The situation is complicated in public health by scientists’ inability to conduct controlled experiments: it is immoral to subject patients to a potentially crippling disease. So scientists are forced to make educated guesses: this population -- of popcorn-factory workers, say -- has probably been subjected to thus-and-such a daily dosage of diacetyl for thus-and-so many years, whereas this other group of workers in the same factory has had less exposure. Meanwhile, people living near the factory but not working in it almost never experience popcorn lung. Hence we make the educated guess that the additional cases of bronchiolitis obliterans are due to diacetyl exposure within the factory.Having reached a tentative conclusion about what’s making people sick, we have some options. We can mandate that factories use a different chemical. Does industry have other, safer alternatives? Presumably it does, but those alternatives are more expensive; otherwise it would already be using them. If industry were forced to use safer alternatives, would economies of scale drive the price down to the point that consumers wouldn’t notice?That approach seems ethically sterile to me. It seems better to start with the assumption that no one should get sick at work. Being ethical about this means, in many cases, taking Paul Farmer’s "preferential option for the poor" seriously. You’d probably find that most people getting sick at work are not wealthy; hedge-fund managers and computer scientists aren’t coming into daily contact with beryllium; even if they are, wealthier folks can insist on workplace-safety measures in a way that the poor cannot. I’d wager that workplace safety is another front in the fight for distributive justice.Michaels is a former Department of Energy official whose work centered on the safety of nuclear plants. As such, he has a somewhat reflexive faith in the power of regulation. To me it rang hollow: one regulation will limit diacetyl, another will limit beryllium, another will prevent factory workers from acquiring repetitive-strain disorders -- but will any real problems be solved? Companies’ desire and ability to game the system is virtually limitless. When they lose the regulatory war, they invent a public-relations campaign to convince Americans that tort reform is necessary. They demonize "trial lawyers" (lawyers who write briefs and stay out of the courtroom are off the hook, as are lawyers who resolve cases before they reach the court). They challenge the very epistemology of the scientific revolution. If worse comes to worst, they move production of noxious chemicals to countries with lower environmental and health standards.What I’m getting at is that we have a much more systemic problem on our hands. I applaud regulation where it helps, but I do wonder if it’s tinkering at the edges of a massive problem that lies at the heart of our society. We need regulation;

we also need education to explain to Americans what science is. We need Americans to believe that we owe much to the least fortunate among us. Until that message gets through, we'll have to content ourselves with putting out little brushfires while the forest burns.

Conflicts of interest among members of EPA review panels have weakened governmental safety standards on toxic chemicals in the environment and in everyday consumer products. Outrage over long-standing reliance on "science for hire" by the chemical industry has prompted Congress to investigate EPA's procedures for reviewing toxic chemicals, including PBDE flame retardants and bisphenol A. These examples are just a small window into how great the tampering and influence of the chemical industry has been over EPA regulation of toxic chemicals. A new book by David Michaels, an epidemiologist and the director of the Project on Scientific Knowledge and Public Policy at The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services, documents a seemingly endless list of examples of mercenary scientists misleading the general public and the regulatory community about the true dangers of chemical exposures, starting from lead, asbestos, and tobacco, and continuing to chromium, berillium, perchlorate, benzene, plastics chemicals, and various other environmental and occupational health hazards.The book is a must-read for anyone who cares about the best application of science in the interests of promoting public health. For a great review, readers can also go to the article by Newsweek's Sharon Begley, "Whitewashing Toxic Chemicals."One stunning quote from the book describes the tricks of the trade that industry lobby and product defense firms use to derail the regulatory process: "They profit by helping corporations minimize public health and environmental protection and fight claims of injury and illness. In field after field, year after year, this same handful of individuals and companies comes up again and again... They have on their payrolls (or can bring in on a moment's notice) toxicologists, epidemiologists, biostatisticians, risk assessors, and any other professionally trained, media-savvy experts deemed necessary. They and the larger, wealthier industries for which they work go through the motions we expect of the scientific enterprise, salting the literature with their questionable reports and studies. Nevertheless, it is all a charade. The work has one overriding motivation: advocacy for the sponsor's position in civil court, the court of public opinion, and the regulatory arena [where these studies benefit their sponsors] not because they are good work that the regulatory agencies have to take seriously but because they clog the machinery and slow down the process. Public health interests are beside the point. Follow the science wherever it leads? Not quite. This is science for hire, period, and it is extremely lucrative."Only by discovering the facts behind the scene and by bringing to light the true motivation of profit-driven public relations

campaigns can we promote and defend the health of the environment and the safety of consumer products. For a veteran in the subject who may have participated in some of the struggles described in Defending Science, or for a new member of the environmental and occupational health community, this book is a great introduction to the state of the field - and the battles ahead that still need to be fought.

Doubt is Their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health Agile Product Management: Product Owner (Box set) : 27 Tips To Manage Your Product, Product Backlog: 21 Tips To Capture and Manage Requirements with Scrum ... development, agile software development) Agile Product Management and Product Owner Box Set: 27 Tips to Manage Your Product, Product Backlog and 21 Tips to Capture and Manage Requirements with Scrum Agile Product Management: Product Owner: 26 Tips to Manage Your Product and Work with Scrum Teams Agile Product Management: Product Vision:: 21 Steps to setting excellent goals for your product (scrum, scrum master, agile development, agile software development) Agile Product Management: Release Planning: 21 Steps to plan your product releases from a product vision with Scrum (scrum, scrum master, agile development, agile software development) Agile Product Management: Product Owner: 27 Tips To Manage Your Product And Work With Scrum Teams (scrum, scrum master, agile development, agile software development) Agile Product Management: Release Planning: 21 Steps to Plan Your Product Releases from a Product Vision with Scrum Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy The Euro: How a Common Currency Threatens the Future of Europe Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security Deadly Choices: How the Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All Money: How the Destruction of the Dollar Threatens the Global Economy - and What We Can Do About It Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West Drawing for Product Designers (Portfolio Skills: Product Design) Research Methods for Product Design (Portfolio Skills Product Design) Graphis Product Design 2: An International Selection of the Best in Product Design (Graphis Products By Design) (v. 2) Take Charge Product Management: Time-tested tips, tactics, and tools for the new or improved product manager Star Wars Miniatures Ultimate Missions: Rebel Storm: A Star Wars Miniatures Game Product (Star Wars Miniatures Product) The Principles of Product Development Flow: Second Generation Lean Product Development