

EMBARGOED UNTIL SEPTEMBER 15, 2009

15th ANNUAL HEINZ AWARDS

RECIPIENT BACKGROUNDER

Deborah Rice, Ph.D., 62, Augusta, Maine

Deborah Rice is a recipient of a 15th annual Heinz Award for her research in neurotoxicology, which studies the interactions of chemicals with the brain and nervous system, and for her leadership in advocating limits of toxic exposure during human development.

After receiving her Ph.D. in toxicology from the University of Rochester, Dr. Rice conducted long-term research to evaluate prolonged, low-dose exposure to the major environmental pollutants lead, methylmercury and PCBs. Her research demonstrated that early developmental exposure to these environmental contaminants planted the seeds for later deficits in cognitive, sensory and motor function.

As a risk assessor at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Center for Environmental Assessment, Dr. Rice played a lead role in determining an acceptable level of methylmercury intake in the mother to prevent cognitive and other behavioral impairment in the fetus. The resultant guidelines are used by many states in setting fish advisories to protect against undue methylmercury exposure from fish. Her testimony for the State of Illinois on the health effects of developmental exposure to methylmercury was instrumental in the regulation of methylmercury emissions and other pollutants from coal-fired power plants.

Now a toxicologist with the Environmental and Occupational Health Program at the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Rice led studies on a flame retardant chemical, deca BDE, which is the last of its class still in production in the United States. The results of that study, documenting developmental neurotoxicity, along with her testimony to the state legislature on the hazard posed by this chemical to human and environmental health, resulted in the 2007 ban of deca BDE by the Maine legislature, which provided the impetus for other states to follow.

Said Teresa Heinz, chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation:

“Dr. Deborah Rice is a trailblazer. She discovered that toxins, like mercury in our fish and chemicals in household products, are making us sick and can even lead to brain damage in our children. Even though her efforts were fair minded and detailed, some tried to silence her work. But, thankfully, her courage and the integrity of her research prevailed and her findings will continue to change public policy. She is a fitting and deserving recipient of one of this year’s Heinz Awards.”

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