Abstract

In the absence of scientific clarity about the potential health effects of occupational exposure to nanoparticles, a need exists for guidance in decisionmaking about hazards, risks, and controls. An identification of the ethical issues involved may be useful to decision makers, particularly employers, workers, investors, and health authorities. Because the goal of occupational safety and health is the prevention of disease in workers, the situations that have ethical implications that most affect workers have been identified. These situations include the a) identification and communication of hazards and risks by scientists, authorities, and employers; b) workers acceptance of risk; c) selection and implementation of controls; d) establishment of medical screening programs; and e) investment in toxicologic and control research. The ethical issues involve the unbiased determination of hazards and risks, nonmaleficence (doing no harm), autonomy, justice, privacy, and promoting respect for persons. As the ethical issues are identified and explored, options for decision makers can be developed. Additionally, societal deliberations about workplace risks of nanotechnologies may be enhanced by special emphasis on small businesses and adoption of a global perspective.

Keywords

Ethics, Hazards, Nanotechnology, Occupational safety and health, Toxicology