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PAULA ZAHN: Topic A this Wednesday morning, the deadly danger of secondhand smoke. The EPA is about to come out with its strongest statement yet on breathing other people's smoke, blaming it for 3,000 cases of lung cancer every year. Dr. Alan Blum, of the organization Doctors Ought To Care joins us this morning from KHOU TV in Houston, and from Washington, Brennan Dawson of the Tobacco Institute.

Good morning to both of you. Thanks for joining us.

DR. ALAN BLUM: Good morning, Paula.

ZAHN: Dr. Blum, the EPA study calls secondhand smoke a top of the line cancer causer, a Class A carcinogen. Just how dangerous is breathing secondhand smoke?

DR. BLUM: Well Paula, it's very dangerous. And I think it's very exciting and important that this EPA report is being released. First of all, it really finally puts proof positive that when we light up and smoke it's more than just a nuisance to other people, it can hurt them. And especially children can over the long period of time disable them, and in some instances, kill them. Now we know, for instance, why when someone said I had an Aunt Mary that didn't smoke at all and got lung cancer, well, it turns out she probably lived 20, 30 years with Uncle Louie in the same house, and went to a work place where smoking wasn't discouraged. Secondly, it's very important that employers are now going to have an opportunity to remove, like asbestos, another carcinogen, from the workplace, and it's probably going to make it easier for President Clinton coming in to office to sign the federal order that has sat on President Bush's desk for two years urging that smoking be removed from the workplace.

ZAHN: Miss Dawson, you've heard what Dr. Alan Blum just had to say, he said the study is proof positive that secondhand smoke can in fact be deadly. I know that your organization feels the study is flawed, but do you acknowledge that there is any danger at

all to secondhand smoke?

DAWSON: Well, if we look at the studies that the Environmental Protection Agency reviewed, and there were 33 of them reviewing the evidence on non-smoker lung cancer, and for example, being married to a smoker. And what 24, or 80% of those 33 studies indicated was that there isn't an increase in risk. So the vast majority of the studies, including those looked at by the Environmental Protection Agency, don't indicate that there's a risk. And the most recent study that was published that wasn't looked at by the Environmental Protection Agency, again, the largest study ever conducted, says that there isn't an increase in risk. If that new study is added to the Environmental Protection Agency's data base their risk comes back down to not statistically significant. So I think the Environmental Protection Agency has a lot of questions that independent scientists have been posing over the three year process of this report that they haven't adequately answered.

Now, if we go to the workplace, for example, which Dr...

ZAHN: Miss Dawson, let's give Mr. -- Dr. Blum a chance to respond to that. He is shaking his head, no. Dr. Blum?

DR. BLUM: Well, it's very sad. I think this is just an example -- it should be very clear who we represent. I represent a small organization of about 10,000 health professionals, and Miss Dawson is here representing a small handful of tobacco executives whose job it is to sell cigarettes.

DAWSON: And also 25% of adult population who smoke.

DR. BLUM: It's very much -- it's -- well, I think that's the sad thing. People from the tobacco industry claim to represent the very people that they're deserv'ing and deceiving, and I think that's a real tragedy.

DAWSON: They're our customers.

DR. BLUM: I don't think the asbestos industry claims to represent the very people they're exposing to asbestos. This is really nonsense. They have huffed and they've puffed for two years and they've tried to prevent this report from coming out. Statistics are very, very good. The scientific evidence here is so good that even those members of the committee that approved this report who have ties to the tobacco industry had to go along with the scientific data. It's that compelling.

ZAHN: Miss Dawson, let me ask you this...

DAWSON: It is not compelling and in fact, that science...

ZAKN: Is this American Lung Association wrong? Is the Surgeon General wrong? Is there nothing here to this report that consumers can latch on to?

DAWSON: Let's understand that this is a very controversial and a very emotional issue. Now, Dr. Blum's organization for years, long before this Environmental Protection Agency report even began was suggesting that no one ought to ever smoke under any circumstances...

DR. BLUM: Not true. My organization deals with cigarette promotion also, but that's not true at all.

DAWSON: And what we should do -- and advocates smoking bans. I mean, that's what the anti-smoking advocates want. Now, contrary to that, what we think is that both smokers and non-smokers should be accommodated, and in fact, that's what public opinion polls support. Two thirds of the American public think that that's where we ought to go. Now, if we look at this report again, there are a number of scientific deficiencies, including the lack of the weight of evidence that the Environmental Protection Agency has used. If we go to the workplace, which is where I was when Dr. Blum interrupted, none of those studies show that there is an increase in risk from being exposed to environmental tobacco smoke in the workplace. And that...

ZAKN: Miss Dawson, can I ask you to...

DAWSON: ...ignored by the Environmental Protection Agency.

ZAKN: You do acknowledge that if people smoke cigarettes it can cause them to get lung cancer. Right?

DAWSON: I think that if people smoke cigarettes they may face an added risk. That is overwhelmingly understood by the American population.

ZAKN: Don't you think there's any possibility...

DR. BLUM: That's right. People who smoke are very reasonable...

DAWSON: And as adults we have the right to make those decisions for ourselves. I don't think it's up to Dr. Blum or frankly anyone else to tell adult individuals what they should do in terms of their lifestyle.

DR. BLUM: Miss Dawson has it all wrong. My friends who smoke are very reasonable people, they are aware of the risk, they're very concerned about it. But what they don't want to do is hurt other people. And I think that the question can be raised to you,

Miss Dawson, or to you, Paula, would you want people smoking around your baby? I don't know very many parents who would.

ZAHN: Miss Dawson, the answer to that question?

DAWSON: I think that's up to the parents to decide. I certainly don't think that I would smoke while holding an infant, but that has nothing to do with the issue at hand. I think that has to do with dropping an ash on a small child. But if we're talking about being reasonable...

ZAHN: You're saying there's no risk at all to a young child sitting there breathing the smoke of a parent smoking? Do you acknowledge that there's any risk at all?

DAWSON: The studies on that, Paula, are very complicated and in fact very confounding. We find that there's some studies that show there's an increase in risk and some studies that show that there's not, and that a lot of it has to do with socio-economic factors and a number of other things. So I think...

DR. BLUM: I hope no one would believe a word that Miss Dawson is saying.

DAWSON: I hope someone would read the Environmental Protection Agency report which says exactly what I'm saying on that issue, Dr. Blum. And perhaps you haven't read it yet.

DR. BLUM: I'm a physician. You are paid to represent the tobacco industry to sell more cigarettes. That's the bottom line here. The nitty gritty is this is hurting sales. And in the California studies that Professor Glance has done there were over two million dollars in lost sales alone, merely because employers got smart and curtailed smoking at the workplace.

ZAHN: How much is this hurting cigarette sales, Brennan Dawson?

DAWSON: It's very frankly not, Paula. What we've seen for over a decade is a very slow decline in the use of cigarettes in this country, despite the Environmental Protection Agency's continual leaks of this document. This document's still not coming out until tomorrow, and it hasn't changed the world in terms of cigarette sales. I don't think it's going to, and I don't think it's going to because people still want to accommodate both smokers and non-smokers and they don't still don't believe people like Dr. Blum who think smoking ought to be banned everywhere and...

DR. BLUM: That's not true at all. I think that the public should respond by writing to OSHA and also President Clinton in urging OSHA to resist the tobacco lobbyists who were formerly working for OSHA now working for the tobacco industry. That's

right. We've just learned yesterday that there is a person working for the tobacco industry lobbying OSHA right as we speak to try to prevent them from implementing regulations on the federal level.

ZAHN: Dr. Blum, Brennan Dawson, we're going to have to leave it there. The debate will continue. The EPA report will be released tomorrow and we'll have lots more on that as the story continues to unfold.

Thank you both for joining us this morning.