

## Media release

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### **Nano: the sexy new science with lots of unanswered questions**

Greater transparency and public engagement about the potential opportunities and risks presented by nanotechnology is required, according to a new report by The Australia Institute.

While still an emerging field, nanoscale sciences and technologies (nanoST) are already present in our daily lives, with more than 1000 consumer products identified as containing nanomaterials. While the science has been quickly adopted in products such as cosmetics, sunscreens, household appliances and cleaning products, the health and environmental risks associated with nanoST are still hotly contested.

*What you should know about nano* by Dr Fern Wickson recommends an 11-point plan of action for policymaking on nanoST development.

**Dr Wickson is presenting today at the Asia-Pacific Science, Technology and Society Network Conference. She will be available for comment between 10 – 11am in the foyer of the Brisbane Convention Centre.**

“There is no dispute that nanoST offers exciting and diverse opportunities, but there should also be no dispute that there are far too many unanswered questions for us to have blind faith in the new technology,” said Dr Wickson.

“Worryingly, early research has shown a similarity between the way the body responds to carbon nanotubes and asbestos. While there is still such a degree of uncertainty about potential risks, consumers are entitled to greater transparency about their exposure to nanoST.”

In a recent report comparing regulatory governance of nanotechnology in the US, Canada, the UK, Australia and Europe, Australia was not described as setting ‘best practice’ standards in the coordination of governance, information gathering, weighing risks against benefits and having an accountable and transparent approach.

Included in Dr Wickson’s recommendations are:

- Mandatory reporting on all products containing nanotubes and other nanomaterials
- A parliamentary inquiry into nanoST
- Health surveillance and environmental monitoring of high potential exposures
- Adopting a precautionary approach to the commercialisation of the technology in cases where the potential for harm has been demonstrated, significant uncertainties remain and social benefits appear marginal.

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“The experiment in nanoST has clearly already begun and as consumers and workers we are already involved,” said Dr Wickson. “The question is, do we want to be and if so, how do we want to be?”

## Notes for Editors

- A copy of *What you should know about nano* is available on request or at [www.tai.org.au](http://www.tai.org.au)