In addition to withholding information, some industries, including lead and vinyl, have reassured the public that their products are benign by controlling research and manipulating science. Throughout much of the twentieth century, most scientific studies of the health effects of toxic substances have been done by researchers in the employ of industry or in universities with financial ties to members of that industry. At times their results were subject to review by industry; if the results indicated a problem, the information was suppressed. At times the independence of the academy has been undermined by industry’s influence through grants and other support for research. As Marcia Angell, editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, has argued, “When the boundaries between industry and academic medicine become as blurred as they now are, the business goals of industry influence the mission of the medical schools in multiple ways.”

Dr. Linda Rosenstock, head of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in the Clinton administration, observed that “efforts of powerful constituencies to manipulate researchers and scientific organizations may constrain vital research on health risks.”

A recent study of corporate funding of academic research revealed that “more than half of the university scientists who received gifts from drug or biotechnology companies admitted that the donor expected to exert influence over their work.”

The concern about corporate corruption of science is so widespread that many scientific journals, including the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine, now require that the source of support for the investigator’s research be clearly identified. Even NIOSH’s own “scientific work continues to be attacked by special interests on an issue by issue basis,” Rosenstock asserted, such that “in many cases of public health science, politics is winning out over research because of the carefully executed tactics of special interest groups.”

Since the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), NIOSH, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 and of independent foundations working with university researchers and public interest groups, a new generation of scientists not employed by industry is highlighting the risks and discounting industry’s assurances about their products and production processes. They are providing research for the public and the public health community to consider. Newspaper articles, television specials, and presentations in other media bring home the personal toll that industry practices take on people’s lives. Increased knowledge has become a powerful weapon in the battle to hold corporations accountable for their impact on public health.