Dear Editor,

The April 1 CW article, “Styrene and cobalt: Headed for the exit?” is inaccurate in its summary of styrene toxicity data. For styrene it is not true that “a cursory inspection of the studies and data...raises more questions than answers”.

Several recent weight of evidence reviews of the ample styrene toxicity database concluded the preponderance of the evidence fails to support a cancer concern for this substance. And the most recent review of the potential for styrene to cause developmental or reproductive toxicity was similarly negative. Useful summaries of these data are available at www.styrene.org. The cancer data is specifically addressed in a report published online in January 2013 by the journal Human and Ecological Risk Assessment, and the reproductive toxicity data were thoroughly analyzed in a February 2006 report by the US’s National Toxicology Program.

Styrene is a uniquely useful chemical. Manufacturers of all sizes have safely used styrene-based thermoset resin systems to make important and useful products since the Second World War. The market acceptance of many products we depend on to save energy and prevent pollution, such as durable and light weight auto and truck components, and the corrosion- and leak-resistant underground storage tanks used for several decades at petrol filling stations, is based at least partially on the long history of the successful performance of these styrene-based composites products.

And it’s important to know that no matter what their actual toxicity, cobalt salts are not volatile and no route of human exposure related to the manufacture or use of composites products has been identified.

Avoiding actual harm to people and the environment is not a defensible reason for suppliers and composites manufacturers to move away from styrene or cobalt.

Sincerely,
John Schweitzer

Vice President, Government Affairs
American Composites Manufacturers Association