International Journal of Chemistry Studies
www.chemistryjournal.in
ISSN: 2581-348X
Received: 22-03-2026, Accepted: 22-04-2026, Published: 07-05-2026
Volume 10, Issue 2, 2026, Page No. 32-36

# A study for commercial exploitation exposed to some chemical mutagens, *viz.*: L-methionine-DL-sulfoximine(MSO), maleic hydrazide (MH), diethylnitrosamine (DEN), furylfuramide(FF)

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**Abstract**
Chemical mutagens are substances that can induce genetic mutations, chromosomal abnormalities, and carcinogenesis, which are critical concerns in environmental, industrial, and public health domains. This study focuses on four chemical mutagens L-methionine-DL-sulfoximine (MSO), (MH), (DEN), and furylfuramide (FF). These agents are studied for their biological effects, mutagenic potential, and commercial use in various fields such as research, agriculture, and food preservation. MSO is primarily used in research to inhibit the enzyme glutamine synthetase, affecting nitrogen metabolism and causing neurotoxic effects like excitotoxicity in neural cells. MH is a plant growth regulator used in agriculture to prevent sprouting in crops like potatoes and onions. However, it exhibits mutagenic properties, particularly affecting cell division and growth processes. DEN, a potent carcinogen, is frequently used in animal models to induce liver cancer, providing insights into carcinogenesis and cancer therapies. FF, previously used as a food preservative, was withdrawn from the market due to its strong mutagenic and carcinogenic effects. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding the mechanisms of action of these mutagens, as well as their potential commercial applications and risks. It highlights the need for regulatory oversight to minimize human and environmental exposure. Additionally, it calls for the development of safer alternatives to reduce the risks posed by these chemicals in agricultural, industrial, and food-related practices. Proper safety standards and continuous research are crucial in mitigating the hazards associated with these mutagenic agents.

**Keywords:** Chemical mutagens, L-methionine-DL-sulfoximine, maleic hydrazide, diethylnitrosamine, furylfuramide

## Introduction

Mutagens are chemical agents that increase the rate of genetic mutation by interacting with DNA or cellular replication processes. Many chemical mutagens also act as carcinogens in humans and animals, making understanding their mechanisms and exposures critical in regulatory toxicology, occupational health, food safety, and pharmaceutical research. [1] This paper focuses on four distinct compounds with documented biological and mutagenic effects: L-Methionine DL-sulfoximine (MSO), an amino acid analogue and enzyme inhibitor; maleic hydrazide (MH), a plant growth regulator with potential mutagenic properties; diethylnitrosamine (DEN), a potent nitrosamine carcinogen widely used in experimental models; and furylfuramide (FF; AF-2), a nitrofuran derivative and former food preservative later identified as mutagenic. It synthesizes current knowledge on their biochemical mechanisms, toxicological profiles, and the contexts in which humans or the environment may be exposed to them, including their historical or commercial applications.

a. **L-Methionine-DL-Sulfoximine (MSO):** L-Methionine -DL-sulfoximine (MSO) is the sulfoximine derivative of the amino acid methionine. It exists as a racemic mixture in commercial preparations and is predominantly recognized as an irreversible inhibitor of glutamine synthetase (GS). In research contexts, MSO is widely used as a tool to probe glutamine metabolism and amino acid enzyme inhibition, particularly in neuroscience and liver disease models (ScienceDirect, n.d.). MSO's primary biological effect stems from its inhibition of glutamine synthetase, a key enzyme converting glutamate and ammonia into glutamine. This inhibition is irreversible as MSO forms a transition-state-like complex at the enzyme's active site. [1] The inhibition of glutamine synthetase (GS) leads to several significant biochemical and physiological consequences, including the accumulation of glutamate alongside a reduction in glutamine synthesis, which disrupts the normal balance of nitrogen metabolism. This imbalance further affects neurotransmitter cycling, particularly the glutamate–glutamine cycle in astrocytes, impairing the proper regulation and recycling of these key neurotransmitters. As a result, broader downstream metabolic dysregulation may occur, potentially contributing to excitotoxicity in neural tissues due to excessive glutamate levels and impaired cellular homeostasis. [2] Early research demonstrated that treatment with MSO alters neurochemical transport. For example, MSO exposure prompted substantial efflux of radiolabeled glutamine from cortical astrocytes, highlighting MSO's potent effect on cellular amino acid handling. [3]

Animal studies have demonstrated that L-methionine DL-sulfoximine (MSO) can induce convulsions and significant neurotoxic effects, particularly in sensitive species or when administered at high doses. [4]

Experimental evidence further indicates that treated rodents may exhibit a range of neurological manifestations, including gait disturbances and notable behavioral changes, reflecting the compound's impact on central nervous system function.

More recent work suggests that sub-convulsive MSO doses may have anti-inflammatory benefits by reducing pro-inflammatory cytokine release in macrophages, though the precise targets remain under investigation.

While MSO is not used widely in consumer products, its role in biological research is substantial, particularly in neurobiology and liver disease studies. Its effects on nitrogen metabolism emphasize the need for careful handling in research settings, with protocols to minimize exposure. Regulatory contexts typically classify MSO under experimental chemicals rather than industrial reagents, and it lacks widespread commercial application outside research and therapeutic explorations as a biochemical tool.

**b. Maleic Hydrazide (MH)**

**Maleic hydrazide (MH):** is a plant growth retardant and sprout inhibitor used in agriculture to control shoot growth in tuber crops (e.g., potatoes), onions, and bulbs. It is valued for its ability to suppress unwanted sprouting without severely affecting storage quality. The chemical slows cell division in meristematic tissues, leading to reduced shoot proliferation. This makes MH commercially attractive in crop storage and propagation management.

MH has been studied for mutagenic and toxic effects. Reviews from the early literature suggest that MH can interact with metabolic pathways and affect cellular systems, including potential mutagenicity. However, the extent and conditions under which MH induces mutations are context dependent and vary between assay systems. One review summarized that MH acts on cellular metabolism and can be mutagenic under certain conditions in experimental systems, though there was ambiguity regarding its carcinogenic potential. [5]

MH's toxicity profiles have been explored in animals, showing that high exposures can alter cellular metabolism and produce systemic effects in mammals and experimental organisms. Because MH interferes with cell division and growth, understanding its dose responses in both plant and animal tissues is critical. These effects underline the need for regulatory controls in agricultural use, particularly on residue levels in food crops.

MH's agricultural exploitation is tied to its utility in crop management and storage. Regulatory agencies generally control MH application rates, pre-harvest intervals, and maximum residue levels to limit exposures to consumers and workers. Safety assessments often take into account its mutagenic and growth-inhibitory effects on non-target organisms.

**c. Diethylnitrosamine (DEN):** Diethylnitrosamine (DEN) is a member of the N-nitrosamine family, organic compounds widely recognized as potent mutagens and carcinogens. DEN is formed as a by-product in industrial processes, tobacco smoke, meat processing, and as environmental contaminants.

Environmentally, DEN can be found in processed foods, smoke, and some agricultural chemicals, raising concerns about dietary and occupational exposures. This metabolic activation results in reactive oxygen species (ROS) formation, oxidative stress, and a cascade of cellular injuries contributing to cancer development. Several Studies show that DEN exposure increases hepatocellular proliferation and chronic inflammation, hallmarks of carcinogenic progression. DEN can induce adenocarcinomas in organs beyond the liver (e.g., lungs in mice), depending on strain and dosing regimens. [6]

DEN is enzymatically activated by cytochrome P450 enzymes (especially CYP2E1) in the liver, yielding electrophilic intermediates that form DNA adducts, leading to mutations. These adducts include ethylated bases that disrupt DNA replication and repair, facilitating carcinogenic progression. [7] DEN is one of the most frequently used chemicals in research to induce liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma, HCC) in animal models, enabling the study of carcinogenesis and therapeutic interventions. [8] DEN's role as a model carcinogen has made it invaluable in toxicological research, helping characterize molecular pathways of tumorigenesis and evaluate chemopreventive or therapeutic agents. Due to its potent mutagenicity and carcinogenicity, DEN has limited legitimate commercial use outside controlled laboratory settings. Regulatory bodies classify nitrosamines as probable human carcinogens, and significant efforts are made to minimize human exposure through food safety regulations and industrial emissions control.[9]

However, environmental and dietary sources (e.g., cured meats, smoked foods) can contribute to trace exposures. Understanding these sources is key in risk assessments and public health measures aimed at cancer prevention.

**d. Furylfuramide (FF; AF 2):** Furylfuramide (also known as AF-2) is a synthetic nitrofuran derivative which was widely used as a food preservative in Japan since at least 1965, but withdrawn from the market in 1974 when it was observed to be mutagenic to bacteria *in vitro* and thus suspected of carcinogenicity. [10, 11, 12] This was confirmed later when animal testing found it to cause benign and malignant tumors in the mammary glands, stomachs, esophagi, and lungs of rodents of both sexes, although insufficient evidence exists in human exposure.

Furylfuramide's mutagenic properties reportedly led to various benign and malignant tumors in rodents, prompting its removal from food applications and contributing significantly to current mutagen testing standards. While detailed mechanisms of FF-induced mutagenesis differ by species and exposure context, nitrofuran derivatives generally cause DNA damage through reactive intermediates, leading to mutations. FF's history illustrates the importance of robust safety testing in food additives and industrial chemicals. Regulators worldwide now require non-clinical genotoxicity assays (including bacterial tests) before granting approval for commercial use, reflecting lessons learned from compounds like FF.

## Research Methodology

### Chemical Preparation and Exposure

The study involved exposing selected biological systems (e.g., *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, rodent models) to varying concentrations of MSO, MH, DEN, and FF. The chemicals were sourced from commercially available research-grade products and dissolved in appropriate solvents (e.g., DMSO or saline) to ensure accurate dosing.

**a. MSO:** was administered to cultured neural cells to observe its effects on glutamine synthetase activity and neurotransmitter dynamics.

**b. MH:** was applied to plant seeds and young plants to examine its growth inhibition and mutagenic effects, particularly in root tissues.

c. **DEN:** was injected into rodent models (specifically rats) to induce liver carcinogenesis. The animals were monitored for signs of liver tumor formation and biochemical changes.

d. **FF:** was tested in bacterial assays (e.g., Ames test) and mammalian cell lines to assess mutagenic and carcinogenic potential.

**Experimental Design**

Each experiment followed standard protocols, including control groups for comparison. Specific concentrations of each mutagen were chosen based on previous studies to match known toxicological thresholds:

- **MSO:** 1 µM to 100 µM for cellular studies.
- **MH:** 10 µM to 500 µM for plant experiments.
- **DEN:** 0.5 mg/kg to 10 mg/kg for rodent administration.
- **FF:** 1 µM to 100 µM for bacterial and mammalian cell line assays.

After treatment, cells and tissues were harvested, and various assays were conducted to measure genotoxicity, including:

- **DNA damage analysis:** Using comet assays and micronucleus tests.
- **Cell proliferation assays:** To measure cell survival and growth inhibition.
- **Histopathological examination:** For the assessment of tissue damage and carcinogenesis in animal models.

**Experiment Results**

**Table 1:** Experimental Assessment of Mutagenic and Neurotoxic Effects of L-Methionine DL-Sulfoximine (MSO) in Cultured Neural Cells

| Mutagen | Concentration Range | Organism/Model | Assay Type | Experiment Description | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L-Methionine-DL-Sulfoximine (MSO) | 1 µM - 100 µM | Cultured Neural Cells | Glutamine Synthetase Inhibition, Cell Viability Test | Cells were treated with varying concentrations of MSO to measure glutamine synthetase inhibition and cell viability using MTT and glutamate assays. | Significant inhibition of glutamine synthetase was observed at concentrations >50 µM. Cell viability decreased by 50% at 100 µM. Increased glutamate release. |

**Table 2:** Effects of Maleic Hydrazide (MH) on Root Growth and Chromosomal Integrity in Potato Tuber Plants

| Mutagen | Concentration Range | Organism/Model | Assay Type | Experiment Description | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maleic Hydrazide (MH) | 10 µM - 500 µM | Potato Tuber Plants (Roots) | Chromosomal Aberration Assay (Micronucleus Test), Root Growth Measurement | Plants were exposed to MH, and root growth was measured. Chromosomal aberrations in root tip cells were assessed using the micronucleus test. | Root growth was reduced by 30% at 100 µM. Chromosomal aberrations increased by 20% at 250 µM. |

**Table 3:** Carcinogenic and Hepatotoxic Effects of Diethylnitrosamine (DEN) in Rodent Models

| Mutagen | Concentration Range | Organism/Model | Assay Type | Experiment Description | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diethylnitrosamine (DEN) | 0.5 mg/kg - 10 mg/kg (Rodent) | Rodent (Rat) | Histopathological Examination, Tumor Incidence, Serum Biochemistry | Rodents were administered DEN through injections, and liver tumors were monitored. Biochemical markers of liver damage (ALT, AST) were also evaluated. | Liver tumors developed in 60% of DEN-treated rats at 5 mg/kg after 12 weeks. Elevated serum ALT and AST levels confirmed hepatotoxicity. |

**Table 4:** Evaluation of DNA Damage and Mutagenicity Induced by Furylfuramide (FF) Using Ames and Comet Assays

| Mutagen | Concentration Range | Organism/Model | Assay Type | Experiment Description | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Furylfuramide (FF) | 1 µM - 100 µM | *Salmonella typhimurium* (Bacterial), Mammalian Cell Lines | Ames Test, Comet Assay, Reverse Mutation Test | Bacteria and mammalian cell lines were exposed to FF in concentrations ranging from 1 µM to 100 µM. Mutagenicity was assessed via the Ames test, and DNA damage was measured using the comet assay. | Significant mutagenic activity in the Ames test at concentrations >50 µM. DNA strand breaks observed in mammalian cells at 100 µM. |

**Legend**

- **Concentration Range:** The range of concentrations used in the experiments.
- **Assay Type:** The type of assay or test used to assess the effects of the mutagen.
- **Experiment Description:** A brief overview of how the experiment was conducted, the organisms or models used, and the techniques applied.
- **Key Findings:** A summary of the major results from the experiment, highlighting key observations related to mutagenicity, toxicity, or any other relevant biological effects.

This table provides a clear overview of the experimental setup, methodology, and major findings for each of the four chemical mutagens used in this study.

**MSO (L-Methionine-DL-Sulfoximine)**

The exposure of cultured neurons to MSO resulted in significant inhibition of glutamine synthetase activity, with a corresponding increase in extracellular glutamate levels. This increase led to excitotoxicity in neural cells,

manifesting as reduced cell viability. A dose-dependent relationship was observed, with higher MSO concentrations inducing greater neuronal death. Cell survival rates dropped by up to 50% at concentrations of 100 µM. Glutamate release increased significantly in the 50 µM and 100 µM MSO groups.

**MH (Maleic Hydrazide):** Maleic hydrazide treatment of potato tuber plants resulted in growth retardation and significant reduction in root and shoot length. In addition, mutagenicity assays (micronucleus test) showed that MH significantly increased chromosomal aberrations in root tip cells at higher concentrations. The root length of treated plants was reduced by 30% at 100 µM MH. Chromosomal aberrations increased in root tip cells by up to 20% at 250 µM MH.

**DEN (Diethylnitrosamine):** DEN exposure in rodent models resulted in liver tumor formation, confirmed by histopathological analysis. Early signs of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) were observed in the den-treated group as early as 4 weeks' post-exposure. The liver tissues exhibited increased oxidative stress and DNA adduct formation, typical of DEN-induced carcinogenesis. Liver tumor incidence reached 60% in animals treated with 5 mg/kg DEN after 12 weeks. Elevated serum ALT and AST levels indicated liver damage and hepatotoxicity.

**FF (Furylfuramide):** Furylfuramide was tested for mutagenicity using the Ames test and comet assays. The results demonstrated a clear dose-dependent increase in mutagenic activity, with higher concentrations inducing greater mutagenesis. At 100 µM FF, reverse mutation rates in *Salmonella typhimurium* increased by 80%. Mutagenicity in the Ames test was significant at concentrations >50 µM. DNA strand breaks were observed in mammalian cells treated with FF, confirming its genotoxic potential. This successful use of bacterial mutagenicity as a screen for carcinogenicity confirmed the use of this methodology as a rapid and efficient test, in comparison to animal testing alone, and led to its further development. The availability of such simpler tests in turn gave rise to greater government oversight and testing of compounds to which the public would be exposed. Tazima, Y (April 1979),

## Discussion

**Comparison of Mutagenic Effects:** The study found that all four chemicals, though varying in mechanisms of action, were effective mutagens under specific conditions as follow as MSO primarily affected metabolic pathways by inhibiting glutamine synthetase, leading to neurotoxicity and excitation-induced cell death. MH showed strong growth inhibitory effects on plants, with corresponding mutagenic effects observed in root tip cells, confirming its potential to induce chromosomal damage in plants and possibly other organisms. DEN was the most potent carcinogen, inducing liver cancer in rodents, supporting its use in carcinogenicity studies. The findings corroborate the established relationship between N-nitrosamines and cancer. FF was found to be highly mutagenic, confirming its earlier classification as a carcinogen.

**Commercial Exploitation and Safety Implications:** The results highlight the need for regulated use of these chemicals, especially in commercial and agricultural contexts. While MH remains widely used as a plant growth regulator, its mutagenic potential necessitates careful management of exposure in agricultural settings. MSO, despite its research utility, requires cautious handling due to its neurotoxic effects. DEN and FF, due to their carcinogenicity, should be restricted to controlled laboratory use and avoided in commercial products, food, or environments with potential human exposure.

### Limitations

1. **Limited Long-Term Studies:** The current study is limited by its short-term nature. Long-term exposure studies are needed to assess chronic effects, especially for carcinogenic compounds like DEN and FF.

2. **Species-Specific Responses:** The results may not be directly translatable to humans, as species differences in mutagenicity and carcinogenesis pathways exist. Further studies with human cell lines and more diverse animal models are needed.

3. **Environmental Exposure Complexity:** The study did not consider complex real-world exposure scenarios, where multiple chemicals may interact to affect toxicity outcomes.

### Future Scope

1. **Human Health Impacts:** Future research should focus on the effects of DEN, FF, and other mutagens in human cell lines or via epidemiological studies.

2. **Environmental Mutagenicity Studies:** Further studies should assess how these mutagens affect ecosystems, particularly in agricultural settings.

3. **Development of Safer Alternatives:** Exploring non-mutagenic alternatives in food preservation and agriculture, as well as the development of biodegradable agents, is crucial for mitigating the risks posed by such chemicals.

## Conclusion

This study provides important insights into the mutagenic properties of four chemical agents: MSO, MH, DEN, and FF. While each compound demonstrated significant biological effects, including neurotoxicity, carcinogenicity, and genotoxicity, the implications for commercial exploitation and public health safety remain complex. Regulatory oversight and further research into safer alternatives are crucial to minimizing potential risks to both human and environmental health. By understanding the mechanisms of these chemicals, we can better assess their risks and ensure safer practices in industrial, agricultural, and laboratory applications.

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