Subject: Re: FW: The meaning of Toronto's pesticide by-law
Date: Wed, 13 Jul 2005 20:57:34 -0700
From: Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>
To: Ernie Crist <ernie_crist@dnv.org>
CC: fonvca@fonvca.org, Cagebc@yahoo.com, NVD Council <dnvcouncil@dnv.org>, James Ridge <James_Ridge@dnv.org>

Dear Councillor Crist,

Thank you for forwarding the article by Gideon Forman. To be perfectly honest though, the article comes across to me as just more than a little hysterical. (Quote: "*My neighbour's lawn chemicals are making me and my children sick!!!*") Beyond the campaign against harmless pesticides, there are people convinced -- without any scientific basis -- that cell phones or overhead power lines are causing cancers. Others say that electrical appliances are making them sick. You can even find groups demanding, in the interest of health, a ban on wearing perfume fragrances in public. In spite of people living longer and healthier lives than ever before, we are ever more afraid of the latest and trendiest health scares. In fact, living longer is the reason why some cancers like prostate cancer rates have increased because if you live long enough, you'll get it eventually. I wonder if those who are convinced that any amount of pesticide equals a health threat, have ever considered the cleaning products under their kitchen sinks. Consider also that in the right concentration there are few substances more deadly than chlorine, yet we put it in our drinking water and swimming pools. In closing, I thought I would leave you with an article by the same Western Standard writer whose item on pesticides I sent to Council. It makes for interesting reading.

Sincerely,
-Brian

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One less voice of sanity and humanity in the DDT debate

Monday, 13 September 2004
Cyril Doll

When J. Gordon Edwards died mountain climbing in Montana's Glacier National Park in July, at the age of 85, most people remembered him as a legendary climber and author of the 1961 book, A Climber's Guide to Glacier National Park. But Edwards's most important work was his lifelong dedication to promoting the use of the zinsecticide dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane--commonly known as DDT--and exposing the junk science that led to its disuse and the deaths of millions that followed.

Despite his efforts, the environmentalist movement has had more success in spreading misinformation about DDT than Edwards ever did in proving its safety. As a result, according to the World Health Organization, as many of 2.5 million people a year die from malaria worldwide, most of them children, and nearly all of the deaths would have been preventable with widespread use of DDT.

From his time as a medic in the Second World War, when he applied DDT to soldiers to prevent the spread of typhus and malaria, to his tenure at San Jose State University teaching entomology, Edwards was known to eat spoonfuls of the chemical to prove how harmless it is to humans. But its effectiveness in fighting insect-borne diseases is unparalleled. In 1943, Venezuela had a reported eight million cases of malaria; after the introduction of DDT, the number of cases was down to 800 only 15 years later. India reported over 10 million cases of malaria in 1935, but had reduced the number of people infected to less than 300,000 by 1969.

But Rachel Carson's beguiling 1962 book, Silent Spring, which warned that chemicals, such as pesticides, were ruining the ecosystem, managed nevertheless to spark a wave of popular opposition to DDT. The danger, she claimed, citing a 1956 study of the chemical, was that DDT caused the eggshells of birds to become thinner. In fact, the study in question showed that 50 per cent more eggs had hatched from birds that had been fed DDT.

The book's impact, however, resulted in DDT being banned in Canada in 1969 and the United States in 1972--despite a U.S. government report that refuted the danger of the chemical. Since then, almost 87 million people, mostly children, have died needlessly from malaria.

Edwards spent the following decades meticulously deconstructing Carson's book--which has since been widely debunked by scientists, including the National Cancer Institute. But environmentalist orthodoxy has persisted, and DDT has been declining in usage worldwide. Western countries, including Canada, along with lobby groups like the World Wildlife Fund, continue to champion its eradication.

Edith Lachapelle, a Health Canada spokeswoman, confirms that "the use of DDT was restricted some 30 years ago and the decision was based on environmental concern." However, she adds, "Since then, we suspect that there are potential human health concerns."

Those suspicions are baseless, says Amir Attaran, a former environmental lawyer who now works as a professor of law and population health at the University of Ottawa. No study exists that proves DDT is harmful to humans, he notes. He calls those comments a product of environmentalist ideology. "One in 20 Tanzanian kids is going to die of malaria before his fifth birthday," says Attaran, who once worked for Harvard University's department of international development. "And somebody can actually come up to me with a straight face and say, 'Well maybe DDT is harmful for these kids.' I'll look at them and say, 'Are you out of your tree?'"

Canada has the dubious distinction of having led other countries in trying to impose a worldwide ban on the chemical. We were the first nation to sign on to the United Nations Environment Program's Stockholm Convention, endorsed this past May, which would have banned the use and production of 12 "persistent organic pollutants," of which DDT was one. Efforts by Attaran helped water down the language of the convention to allow DDT's use in developing countries. "I found my own country to be the biggest problem of them all," says the Vancouver native.

Nobody from the Canadian International Development Agency, which contributed $20 million to the convention, responded to interview requests. But Julia Langer, director of international organization projects for WWF Canada, says, "Canada has been a very strong proponent of this treaty, mainly because we find these chemicals regularly in our water, in our air, in our body, in our wildlife and in our food."

But even Langer admits that DDT is not poisonous to humans. "It's not the kill-you-dead kind of chemical," she says. But the WWF remains a believer in the thinning eggshell theories in Carson's book. "It's not acutely toxic, but the way it works is quite insidious by affecting development of the reproductive system by affecting immune systems," says Langer. Even if the environmentalist's concerns were warranted, it's still hard to imagine why anyone would consider the gauge of an eggshell so much more important than the lives of the million children more that will be lost this year for lack of DDT. It's a question that Edwards, despite all his noble efforts, ultimately took to his grave.