

# Stop the Poisoning

## A Beyond Pesticides Forum

*Beyond Pesticides/National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP) convened a forum with 25 cosponsors\* at The Riverside Church in New York City on October 14, 2000 to rally public support for the phase out of community pesticide use and the adoption of safe pest management strategies. 700 people attended the meeting. The Presidential and New York Senate candidates were invited.*

### Introduction

**Jay Feldman, executive director,  
Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP**



We are here to stop pesticide poisoning. We may have been awakened to the daily pesticide assault on our health and the environment as a result of governments' response to the West Nile Virus (WNV). We may have experienced or seen illness

or disease associated with pesticide use. We may be aware that widely used pesticides, like those used to attack mosquitoes, can cause a range of health effects — disrupt the endocrine system, cause cancer, damage the nervous system or cause respiratory problems. Public officials repeatedly describe pesticides as safe and harmless. We can see the total disregard for people in the video produced by Roy Doremus, which documents the direct spraying of people in New York City's WNV spray program. The chemical response to WNV and characterizations of safety are symptomatic of a larger problem — whether it is pesticide use in our school, on our food, in our parks or in public places. The response required to some problems is systemic change — changes in regulation, standards of safety, research priorities, and eliminating corporate influence over the scientific process. Other changes start at home and in the garden as well as utilizing our purchasing power. Still other change must happen at the community level. We have an opportunity to join a national movement to remove pesticides from our community. Our future rests with clear protective human health and environmental standards and a clear commitment to programs that effect a transition to sustainable alternatives not reliant on pesticides.

### Pesticides and Human Health

**Lucy Waletzky, M.D., physician, Westchester, NY**



The public health problems resulting from the pesticide spraying for WNV have been grossly understated by public officials and the media. Again this year, there has been no effort made to inform the public where

they should report pesticide related health complaints. Some people have managed to figure it out themselves, so that some of the essential data is now being collected. In New York City (NYC), where approximately 200 complaints have been registered, people are being bounced between the WNV hotline and poison control. They are not getting knowledgeable answers to their health concerns. In addition, some people have experienced hotline personnel trying to talk them out of their symptoms. In Westchester, NY, pesticide health data is being collected in four ways. First is their WNV hotline, which had received 43 complaints by September 1<sup>st</sup>. Symptoms relate to: trouble breathing, including worsened asthma, trouble swallowing, tingling, neuropathy, impaired concentration and a variety of other symptoms related to the eyes. Westchester mailed a letter to internists, pediatricians and family doctors with a simple form to fill out with pesticide complaints. They are also getting information from the Hudson Valley Poison Control and emergency room data from local hospitals. While it is good that Westchester is collecting the data, and the City and other counties should follow suit, the data has not been released to the public, physicians or the media.

### Critical Analysis of EPA Decisions

**Herbert Needleman, M.D., University of Pittsburgh Medical School, co-author,  
*Raising Children Toxic Free*, Pittsburgh, PA**



A year ago, I was appointed to EPA's Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP), and I began to try to understand the issue of pesticides and their regulation. I participated in the regulation of malathion in August 2000. I want to tell you about this be-

cause it is informative and helpful in understanding how things get regulated or how they do not get regulated. The issue was, "Is malathion a carcinogen?" EPA reviews laboratory animal (rats and mice) data, looking at four dose levels — low, medium, high and very high. Then the animals are sacrificed and examined by pathologists for cancer. In February 2000, the Cancer Assessment Review Committee (CARC) classified malathion as a likely human carcinogen. The evidence produced from the rodent studies was persuasive that malathion was a carcinogen and it was likely to have this effect in humans. In April,

CARC reconvened and downgraded the definition to “suggestive of carcinogenicity, but not sufficient to assess human carcinogenic potential.” There were no new studies done that led to this revision. Instead, the manufacturer requested a review committee to reevaluate the pathology slides. The number of carcinomas in exposed mice, originally 16, was reduced to eight. If one is permitted after looking at exposed groups and diagnoses to exclude selected groups and to change selected diagnoses, one can achieve, with little effort, any association it wants. If EPA permits this type of analysis for government regulation, its credibility will be severely and justifiably damaged. The conclusions drawn by CARC violate the canons of epidemiology. If written up and submitted to a high quality scientific journal, they would be rejected out of hand. They would never see the light of day.

## Corporate Influence of Regulation

**Bill Hirzey and Dwight Welch, senior vice president and executive vice president respectively, National Treasury Employees Union, Chapter 280, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC**



*(The positions discussed by Dr. Hirzey and Mr. Welch represent their own personal opinions and not of their labor union and not necessarily, or probably not, those of EPA.)*

Almost 20 years ago, the professionals at EPA headquarters decided to organize in order to protect our ability to do our job and professional ethics. We have been fighting this battle continuously since then. The function of government in a capitalist society is to protect capital. There is no place in government where that dictum is more obvious and has greater impact on civil servants than the EPA. We see it everyday in our work. It is all about protecting corporations. From the beginning the union has pushed EPA for a code of professional ethics to protect the professionals at EPA from unreasonable interference with their work from politicians. This last year we got seven principles of scientific integrity pushed through and issued by the administrator. The first complaint that we filed as a violation of these principles has to do with how the agency is dealing with malathion. One is the cancer risk assessment in which Dr. Needleman's position tracks precisely with that of a senior EPA toxicologist, Brian Dementi, Ph.D. In addition, EPA management, over scientific objection, rejected a three-fold safety factor, after being contacted by the chemical registrant. These issues have now been brought to the Inspector General of EPA. This is the kind of thing for which people in high positions should be fired.

## Public Health Threats in Perspective

**Deborah Wallace, Ph.D., Center for Children's Environmental Health, Columbia School of Public Health, New York, NY**



While our whole city was sprayed with pesticides, there were very few deaths from the virus we were being protected from. When serum was collected in Queens, it was discovered that many people carried the virus, but showed no symptoms. Yet complaint after complaint of asthmatic reaction to these pesticides was heard. Asthma is linked to diabetes. Annually, in NYC approximately 200 people die of asthma. This is more than ten times the number of people who have died of the WNV. The asthma mortality of East Harlem is five times that of Forest Hills. In the poor neighborhoods, about 20 to 25% of seven year olds have asthma. Nationally, approximately, one quarter of all African American women over the age of 55 are diabetic. Diabetes ranked seventh as a cause of mortality in the U.S. This is a true public health threat; this is not WNV. We cannot conduct proper epidemiological research on either diabetes or asthma because there is no good surveillance system. We have spraying meant to save us from a disease with a very low public health impact. The spraying triggers asthma attacks and asthmatics can die during these attacks. The public health authorities have not even bothered to establish a proper surveillance system for either disease, twenty years after the beginning of the epidemics. Managing these diseases and developing drugs eats a large portion of available funding. We must therefore conclude that the only official solution to public health problems seems to be chemicals, either drugs or pesticides. The public policies that lead to disease or disorder get no contemplation or exploration.

## Pesticides and Embryos — A Basis for Concern

**Louis Guillette, Ph.D., professor of Zoology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL**



There are effects from pesticides that are beyond what are traditionally tested for. Most of us here recognize Rachel Carson. However, most of the kids growing up today do not, and they assume that the environment is clean and that the government is taking care of us. When Rachel Carson wrote her book, *Silent Spring*, in the 1960s, we were dealing with some 200 chemicals actively being used in the environment. Today, the number is somewhere in the neigh-

borhood of 80,000 to 90,000 chemical formulations. We do not know what these chemicals do even as individual chemicals, and we certainly do not know what they do when they are mixed together. Cells have to talk to one another through signal transduction in order to survive, grow and reproduce. The endocrine system is a system of chemical messengers that controls basically everything that takes place in your body. The hypothesis of endocrine disruption suggests that environmental contaminants can alter how cells talk to one another. Normal hormones in your body (estrogens, androgens, thyroid hormones, insulin, etc.) travel through the blood and go to cells and get a normal response. However, the contaminants act as mimics and interact with cells, or act as hormone blockers, blocking signals to cells or an embryo. Instead of the overt toxicity, we are exposing populations to low level contaminants for a longer period of time. If you are looking for subtle endpoints—changes in intelligence, changes in immune system, and changes in fertility—you do not do high dose experimentation as you do for cancer endpoints, because high dose studies actually give you a lower response. The early studies in wildlife showed reproductive abnormalities, animals that could not take care of their young, alterations in behavior and growth. These animals were showing an accumulation of effects that we call endocrine disruption. In my studies, we find male animals with significantly depressed testosterone (the male sex steroid). We find females with twice the normal levels of estrogen. We find abnormalities in ovaries. These problems persist from birth, creating organiza-

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tional abnormalities that take place during fetal development and last a lifetime. My studies have shown decreased phallus size among 20% to 25% of alligators living in a chemically contaminated lake, with some difficulty determining their sex at all. Testicular cancer does not show itself until a young man is in his 20s or early 30s, but we now believe that probably 80% of these cancers are set up during embryonic development. Many of the assumptions about thresholds, about the linearity of dose response curves do not work when you look at the nervous system and the endocrine system. The way we are testing pesticides today does not include these approaches. We should use more common sense and more caution.

*Video and audio recordings of the entire Beyond Pesticides Forum will be available in late-November for \$10. For more information or to order a recording of the Forum, contact Beyond Pesticides/ NCAMP.*

\* The groups sponsoring *Stop the Poisoning* included Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP, Cancer Awareness Coalition, Citizens' Action, Committee for Change, Citizen's Campaign for the Environment, Connecticut Seeking Alternatives for the Environment, Consumers Health Freedom Coalition, Earth Save Long Island, Environmental Advocates, Environment and Human Health, Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition, International Preparedness Network, Fairfield County Sierra Club, Grassroots Environmental Education, Long Island Neighborhood Network, New Jersey Environmental Federation, Environmental Defense, New York City Greens, New York Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, New York Public Interest Research Group, Northeast Organic Farming Association of NY, Northfork Environmental Council, 1 in 9 Breast Cancer Action Coalition, South Bronx Clean Air Coalition, Town of North Hempstead, Westchester Seeking Alternatives for the Environment.

## Ralph Nader, consumer advocate, 2000 Presidential Candidate, Washington, DC



One of the most interesting memories that I have is when Rachel Carson came out with her book, *Silent Spring*, and I saw the ridicule that was heaped on her by the so-called scientific establishment. It was then that I realized the distinction between corporate science and academic science.

Corporate science has truly become far too powerful for the good of science. Corporate science pervades the whole area of evaluation of the impact that technology has on our health and safety. We see it very heavily, obviously, in biotechnology. We have seen it for many more years in the area of pesticides. One, corporate science is driven politically by the political power. Two, it demands confidentiality, which is contrary to the traditions of free scientific exchange and for peer review. It compromises anyone who touches it with proprietary contracts and confidentiality agreements. Three, it is driven overwhelmingly by the profit motive. When you combine the political power of these companies to get their way in Washington, in state capitals, or in dominating the media, you see a constant drive to sell more chemicals. For example, there is very little profit for these companies in prevention of the situations that lead to the perceived need by farmers and people in homes and schools to use pesticides. There is little money in prevention, but there is tremendous money in responding to a situation that could be foreseen and precluded with a minimal amount of force. That means that the whole process is rigged in favor of more and more chemical application. Corporate science, therefore needs to be a bigger issue.

We also have the situation of inadequate resources for testing. EPA is so far behind in testing pesticides—the combinations, the synergistic effects, the inert ingredients. I think people need to realize how much more EPA should be doing just in testing and evaluation; and what it is doing, or can do, or is allowed to do by a retrograde Clinton/Gore administration. They would be shocked. There are a lot of people that think that they are being protected by EPA and they are not. Even when EPA gets around to banning one of these chemical applications like Dursban, they let the companies sell the rest of the inventory by the end of the year. Imagine the Department of Transportation saying to some car company, “Well, we think that you are selling defective vehicles, and we are now going to prevent you from selling them, but you can sell the rest of your inventory.”