

Jim Moore strains . . . tugs . . . grunts . . . but to no avail as his team failed to place in Thursday's Homecoming tug of war.

Photos by Steve Crowell

Geraldine Ferraro comes to lunch See Page 3A

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Coalition charges EPA with cover-up

By Paul Ertelt
Of the Emerald

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has covered up evidence of the effects of dioxin on human health and has suppressed its studies of toxic herbicides used in the Oregon coast range, charge plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed Thursday in the U.S. District Court in Eugene.

The suit seeks, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the release of all documents relating to the EPA's studies of the impact of herbicides on human health in the Siuslaw National Forest.

The lawsuit names William Ruckelshaus, administrator of the EPA, as defendant. Plaintiffs in the case are Carol Van Strum, Paul Merrell and the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP).

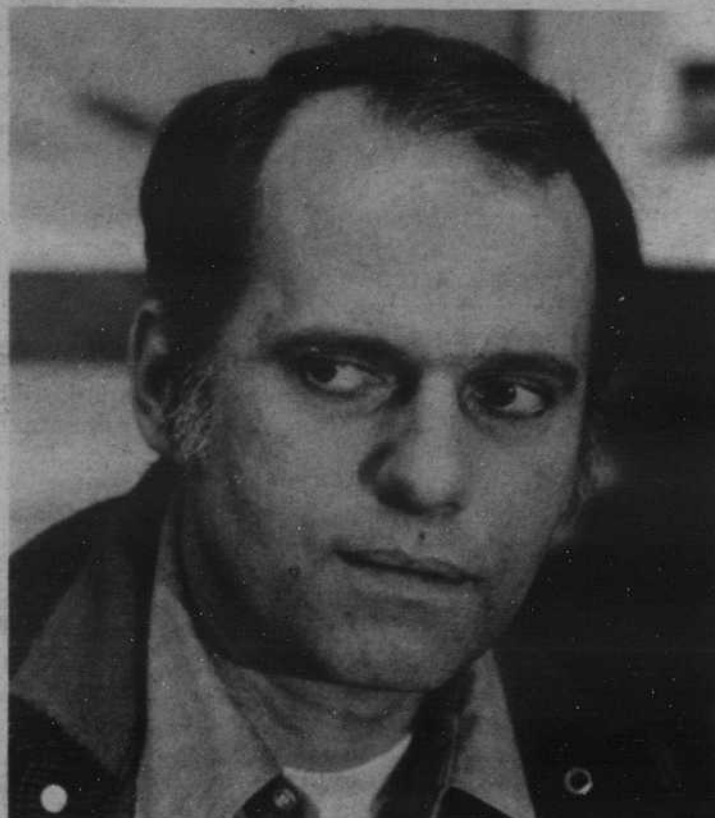
Merrell, a student at the University's law school, and Van Strum are residents of the Five Rivers area of the Alsea River drainage in western Oregon.

Merrell and Van Strum have been active in the battle to ban dangerous herbicides since the 1970s. Van Strum is the author of "A Bitter Fog: Herbicides and Human Rights," a book which recounts her experience with herbicide spraying near her home. Merrell is a Vietnam veteran who was exposed to agent orange, a defoliant containing dioxins.

In a news conference Thursday, Merrell charged that the EPA is withholding information that refutes its claim that samples taken in the region show no traces of dioxin. The dioxin group of chemicals consists of about 75 similar substances that have been linked to genetic defects and cancer.

"We've got to get this straightened out," Merrell said. "We may have a public health emergency on the Oregon coast range."

The lawsuit outlines what Merrell considers an attempt by the EPA to cover up its knowledge of amounts of dioxins in the environment and their effects on human health.



Paul Merrell

Between 1975 and 1977, an Alsea-area woman suffered four spontaneous abortions. Her doctor, suspecting a link to herbicide spraying, contacted the EPA, which took blood, animal and soil samples from the woman's yard.

Dr. Michael Watson, who conducted the tests for the EPA, told the woman there were no traces of dioxin in the samples. But later Watson told a biologist that there were traces of dioxin in the soil, the lawsuit charges.

The EPA conducted further tests in 1978 when eight Alsea-area women reported spontaneous abortions. That study was expanded to study rates of spontaneous abortions in a 1,600 square mile area. Results of the study showed 130 spontaneous abortions per 1,000 compared to 46 per 1,000 in a control group.

Based on this data, the EPA issued an emergency suspension order for 2,4,5-T and 2,4,5-TP (Silvex), two herbicides. But the EPA allowed the Dow Chemical Co. to edit out references to the Alsea studies from a report on dioxin in the United States.

The lawsuit includes transcripts of telephone negotiations between the EPA and the chemical company, which Merrell said he received through an FOIA request.

"EPA officials suppressed the evidence Vietnam veterans needed to win their class-action lawsuit over agent orange," he said.

Representatives of neither EPA nor Dow Chemical Co. were available for comment.

In July, 1983, Michael Axline, Merrell's attorney and a University law professor, obtained part of the results of the Alsea study from a University of Nebraska professor. These results show high levels of dioxin in Western Oregon water, wildlife and tissue samples, including a tissue sample of a baby born without a brain in Lincoln County, Merrell said.

But when confronted by Merrell, the EPA claimed there had been a mixup in samples and the samples with the highest levels of dioxin came from a Dow plant in Michigan.

Merrell then requested that the EPA provide all information on its studies of the Alsea area, whether completed or not. That request was denied, so Merrell and Van Strum decided to file the lawsuit.

"We are very disturbed by this conduct," said Norma Grier, director of NCAP. "We think it undermines the integrity of EPA's entire regulatory process."

Right-to-life groups battle proposed clinic

By Cynthia Whitfield
Of the Emerald

A proposed outpatient surgery clinic has Lane County medical organizations, right-to-life groups, religious organizations and area physicians clashing over the desirability of the project.

The conflict arose when the physicians brought their request for the new clinic to a hearing before the Western Oregon Health Systems Agency.

An estimated 100 to 200 people showed up at the Oct. 10 hearing to oppose the opening of the proposed Eugene Day Surgery, to be located near Sacred Heart Hospital. The op-

ponents of the facility fear most surgeries performed at the clinic will be abortions.

Finally, at a standing-room-only meeting Thursday night, WOHSAs voted against the proposed clinic. WOHSAs is only link in the chain of groups that decide whether or not to approve construction of the facility.

"They say abortion is only one of the procedures they intend to perform, but the language in their application does not mention these others. Verbally they speak of full-scope surgery but the application only speaks of gynecological surgery," said the Rev. Kurt Mach, spokesper-

son at the meeting for various right-to-life and religious groups.

"Of the 10 doctors, eight are gynecologists. It doesn't seem reasonable to me (that) gynecologists would be performing ear, nose, and throat operations. The majority of them are practicing abortionists," said Mach, pastor of Community Christian Fellowship.

However, Dr. Paul Kaplan, a prospective Eugene Day Surgery physician, says the physicians involved in the group consist of eight physicians, seven OB-gynecologists, and one general surgeon.

"Most of them do some

pregnancy termination, but that's not the main thing," he said.

Kaplan says eye surgery, knee surgery and plastic surgery are all procedures the clinic hopes to do as more physicians join the staff.

In the meantime WOHSAs' function is to review the physicians' application and determine whether it conforms to its review criteria. WOHSAs is a non-profit organization developed through an act of Congress in the 1970s to maintain health services at the lowest costs and highest quality levels, said Karl Eysenbach, WOHSAs planning and review manager.

On Nov. 9, the agency's board of directors will vote on WOHSAs' decision and make a recommendation to the State Health Planning and Development Agency, which will ultimately decide the fate of the clinic.

"We are recommending against this clinic," Eysenbach said. "Eugene already has a high rate of outpatient surgery... 35 percent of the simple surgery performed in Lane County is outpatient surgery; 40 percent is the highest that could realistically be performed."

Eysenbach also said Eugene Day Surgery will cost more than

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