

Refused pesticide ban bodes ill for public

The Environmental Protection Agency's decision last week to allow the pesticide chlordane to remain on the market despite repeated calls for its ban leaves doubts about the agency's willingness to protect the environment and public health.

Chlordane, a termite killer, has shown to cause cancer and a host of other health problems in laboratory animals. Used in millions of American homes and businesses, this chemical has been hotly protested as a dangerous product by environmentalists and scientists since its introduction in the 1970s.

New York, Massachusetts and Japan have banned the product because of its potential health hazard to humans, and the EPA has prevented its use on food products. Despite independent scientific evidence to the contrary, the EPA said it did not have enough information to warrant an immediate ban on the pesticide and could not deem it "imminently hazardous" under the national pesticide law.

Moreover, the agency concedes in contradictory terms that chlordane is a risk to humans only when it's used improperly, stating that it causes "moderately severe" health reactions when ingested, inhaled or in contact with the skin. The pesticide also proves to cause chronic liver damage and may cause eye irritation.

Yet the EPA claims there is insufficient evidence to prove that it causes cancer and damages the immune and nervous systems in humans — a claim many scientists dispute.

The dispute renews old charges that the EPA is insensitive toward consumers and the environment. The issue also recalls the dark days of the EPA under the direction of Anne Burford, who often allowed dangerous pesticides on the market despite recommendations that they be banned.

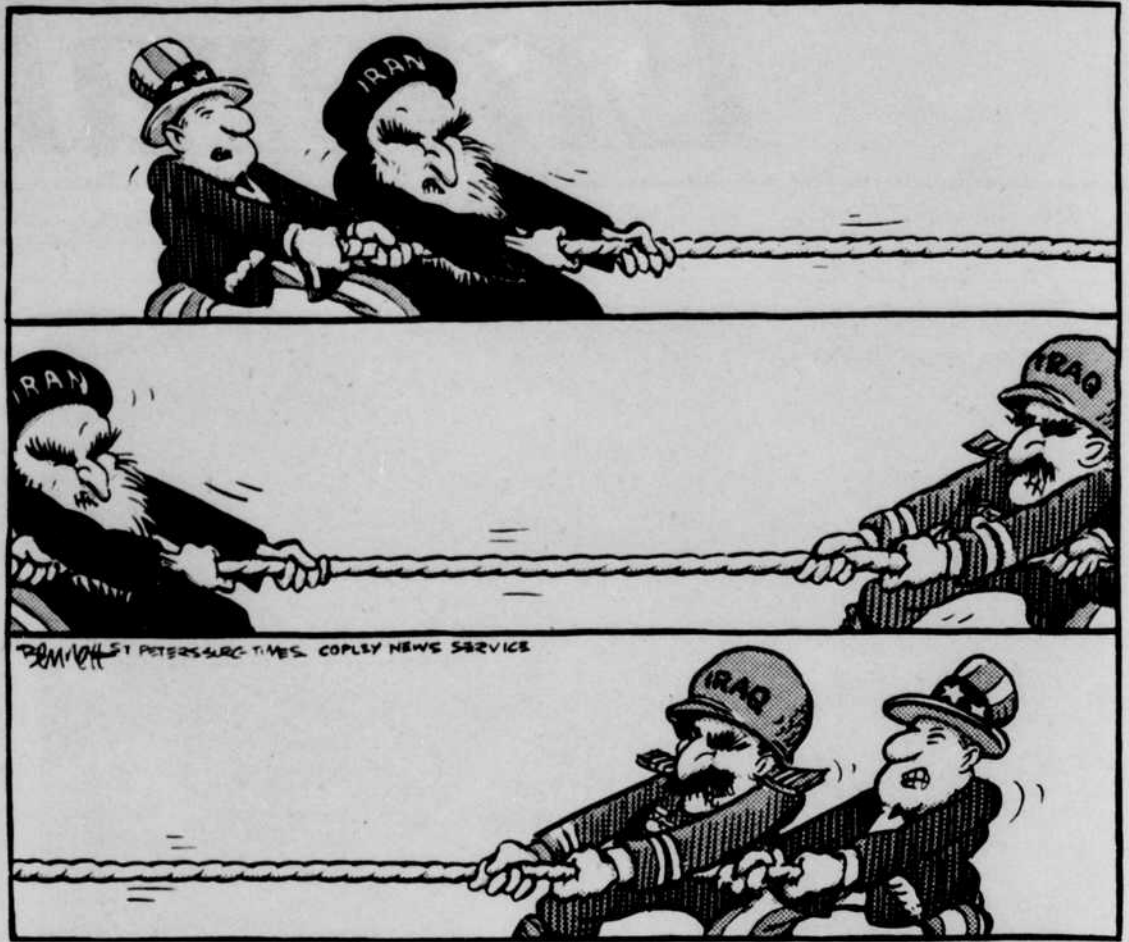
The EPA's chlordane report goes only as far as to say that it "may pose enough risk of cancer to be a regulatory concern," and merely recommends warning labels be placed on the product and that trained applicators use the chemical.

But these provisions are voluntary, and the onus of enforcing these or more stringent measures against chlordane's use falls on individual states. Chlordane is used throughout the country, and regulation of its use should be under federal authority. Clearly, the EPA is not doing its job.

Another questionable aspect of the EPA's decision not to ban chlordane is that the federal agency requires the pesticide's manufacturer, Velsicol Chemical Corp., to provide the EPA with testing information to fill in "data gaps" regarding the effects of the chemical on human health and the environment — essentially appointing Velsicol as its own overseer.

The foreboding irony is that this same corporation defeated attempts for an emergency ban on chlordane in 1985. Suspicions were raised then that the EPA was involved in closed-door decision making with the chemical corporation. These very suspicions have resurfaced today.

The EPA's refusal to ban chlordane is unfortunate and stands as rude testimony to its perverse practice of protecting corporate interests rather than taking responsibility for what the agency was designed to do — protect the environment and public health.



Letters

Tragedy

Recently I attended a showing of the movie *Blue Velvet* on campus in Room 150 Geology. The film featured a character named Frank, a middle-aged, sadistic lunatic who concentrated most of his abuse on a female character, and was graphically shown raping her and punching her repeatedly.

It's hard to know what to make of such scenes, proffered by the movie industry as entertainment.

Equally puzzling, and more disturbing than the film itself, was the audience reaction. Though the film's protagonist was a likable kid, the male students in the audience identified with Frank and were cheering his exploits. A chorus of "Go, Frank! Yeah! Frank!" accompanied the entire rape scene, and wild applause erupted each time Frank struck the woman in the face with his fist.

I sat in the theater and felt physically afraid to be a woman.

Can this sort of thing be justified? Is the modern movie-going experience the new-age equivalent of classical tragedy, said to have purged the ancient Greek populace of its dangerous impulses?

But an audience comes away from the tragedy with a sense of the greatness inherent in human nature. The only thing made clear to me in watching *Blue Velvet* with college students is that human nature stinks. A public stoning would have been more fun.

Maxine Frost
Theater, English lit.

Conflict

In my letter to the *Emerald* Jan. 8, I stated that for "post-Christian agnostics" like myself the irresolvable conflict between religious faith and secular reason has led to our reliance on modes of inquiry that involve the scientific study of the natural world and critical historical analysis.

I also suggested that universities should encourage consistent critical analysis, and that the realm of religious belief should not be considered an exception if undersirable "psychological compartmentalization" is to be avoided.

Subsequently, a number of dissenting reactions appeared in the *Emerald's* Letters section. One such response was that of Anton Tolman, psychology GTF, whose Jan. 13 letter contained the following: "...To me the idea that Jesus is the promised Messiah is a fact because I have had experiences in my life that have convinced my once-skeptical self of the reality of religious truths."

Although Tolman is entitled to his personal beliefs about Jesus and the alleged existence of a God, he cannot assert that his beliefs represent truth or verified knowledge unless they can pass the kinds of validating tests which scientific scholarship requires.

Surely as a psychology GTF, Tolman must be aware that mere personal testimony is not a sufficient basis for determining the veracity of a stated opinion!

Scientific inquiry seeks to understand things on the basis of objective rigor, rather than unsubstantiated faith in some pre-conceived world view that is discontinuous with rational processes. Tolman's bifurcated stance is an example of "psychological compartmentalization"

Jello protest

I would just like to congratulate Don Arney and Matt Uhre for writing what is possibly the most eloquent argument I have ever read against the misuse of jello (ODE, Jan. 28).

Their letter against the evil food abusers at the Housing Department is just what the people of this university need to realize how much we abuse jello. Just look at all the abuse that finger jello takes.

They remind us that there is famine and malnutrition in the world, and I couldn't agree more. Since jello is so high in nutritional value, I have decided to try to organize a program to mail jello to starving countries.

I am now calling on the residents of this university to fight this jello abuse and mail their jello to the starving person of their choice.

If you think that this letter is sarcastic, you're right! But I would like to point out that I do think we should do something about world hunger, but jello is not the solution.

Eric J. Winkler
Journalism

Ron Rouseve
Counseling psychology professor

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