



THE PUBLIC REPORT



SPRAY FABLES

FROM PAGE ONE

the Environmental Protection Agency to claim that pesticides are safe when used according to the label, and it usually doesn't. We do hear it occasionally, however, from private lumber company representatives, the department of forestry and the department of agriculture. Examples of statements which constitute misbranding in labelling include claims as to the safety of a pesticide or ingredients that are said to be safe, nonpoisonous, non-injurious, harmless or non-toxic to humans or pets with or without such a qualifying phrase as "when used as directed." (Code of Federal Regulations 162.10)

Secondly, the information concerning toxicity on pesticide labels is based on the lethal dose after one brief exposure. The degree of toxicity indicated on the label has no correlation at all to the risk of low-dose chronic or cumulative effects, such as nervous system damage, cancer, fetal injury, miscarriage and mutations. Nothing on the label is going to tell us whether the pesticide has been tested for these effects and if it has, whether or not it may cause damage.

The three signal words on pesticide labels relate only to the lethal dose in rodents. These words are:

CAUTION — Lethal dose is greater than five hundred milligrams/kilograms

WARNING — Lethal dose falls between fifty and five hundred mg/kg

DANGER — Lethal dose is less than fifty mg/kg.

The amitrol case illustrates the fallacy of assuming safety based on lethal dose. Amitrol is an herbicide used in Clatsop County during last spring's spray season. Its label has the CAUTION signal word. It has a very low acute toxicity. The lethal dose is fifteen thousand mg/kg. However, it has been found to be a very potent anti-thyroid agent. Very small amounts resulted in significant effects on thyroid function. Five mg/kg over a span of two years caused the development of pre-malignant and malignant tumors in mice.

Another myth about pesticide safety is that a "no observed effect level" can be determined for a pesticide. A "no observed effect level" is used to calculate a permissible exposure level for humans. Yet, the "no observed effect level" will be different for every kind of effect that is studied, i.e., carcinogenesis, mutagenesis, teratogenesis (birth defects). Also the quality of the observation for the "no observed effect level" varies widely among the kinds of tests done, i.e., gross observation, looking at slides (histopathy), or clinical chemistry.

It has been determined that there is no safe dose for any cancer initiator or mutagen. There is no basis for saying there is a safe level of a carcinogen or a mutagen. Exposure to these causes irreversible changes that alter the genetic material in the cell permanently. The altered cells are cumulative in the organism.



We accumulate cancer initiated or mutated cells in relation to the dose, and since there is no repair between exposures there can be no safe dose.

The final myth, and perhaps the most widely assumed one, is that the Environmental Protection Agency registration of a pesticide means that it has been tested for health effects and shown not to cause any significant health hazards to humans. According to a law passed by Congress in 1972, the EPA should review the data files to find evidence that a pesticide is not likely to be harmful to humans in terms of chemical toxicity, carcinogenesis, teratogenesis, mutagenesis, reproductive toxicity such as causing sterility and neural (nerve) toxicity.

Since the law says that the EPA will do the above, the law is often quoted as being evidence that the EPA has done this. This is not true. In 1976 there was a review of how the EPA was doing in implementing the 1972 law. The conclusion: total failure.

In 1978, standards for testing and yardsticks for evaluating test data were begun.

In 1980, eight years after the law was passed, the EPA had finally done a review of seven different active ingredients. There were fifteen hundred registered active ingredients in 1972 and thirty-five thousand registered pesticide formulations. The fifteen hundred has been narrowed down to six hundred and five active ingredients definitely in use. Seven is a rather small start.

"Registration standards" for the active ingredients are the lists of satisfactory tests available (existing) and the lists of data gaps that should be filled to meet the standards of the 1972 law. So far, there are thirty-seven registration standards completed out of six hundred and five. After the registration standard is published, the manufacturer must perform the missing tests to fill the data gaps — so it is usually several years before a pesticide can be registered, unless the EPA makes concessions to not require certain kinds of data, which it is now doing.

The EPA is reregistering some chemicals because it is cancelling some data needs in spite of the 1972 law. The current policy of the EPA is that it will not cancel routinely the registration of products for which it lacks data,

or withhold registration of new products merely for lack of data. Conclusion: Even if a product is registered, that does not mean it complies with the 1972 law requiring safety tests.

What does all this mean to us? It means that relying on the EPA and other agencies to determine the safety of herbicide use is unwise. It means that we, the public, must become active, voicing our opinions to those people making decisions that affect us who may not have the public's health protection foremost in their minds. It means we must work to protect our water supply. The public's needs and concerns must be taken into account. We have a unique opportunity at this time to effect some changes which will offer greater protection of our watersheds.

Mary Sellin lives in Cannon Beach and is a member of OCEAN, which is a group of Clatsop County citizens working toward public recognition of the dangers involved with the use of pesticides, most notably the long-term environmental and economic effects. Much of the article has been based on information given at an OCEAN seminar November 20 by Doctor Ruth Shearer, a genetic toxicologist. For further information, write to: OCEAN, P.O. Box 175, Cannon Beach, Oregon 97110. This is the first of a two-part series. Part two will appear in the next issue of the Times Eagle.

letters

NEWEST MEMBER

TO THE EDITOR:

As the newest school board member of District 10, I would like to introduce myself and express a sincere desire to serve our community. My philosophy is that the strength of forward motion calls for communication. Education is designed to enhance the development of a community, and your input is most welcomed. My telephone number is 436-1705.

Lindi Reid, Cannon Beach

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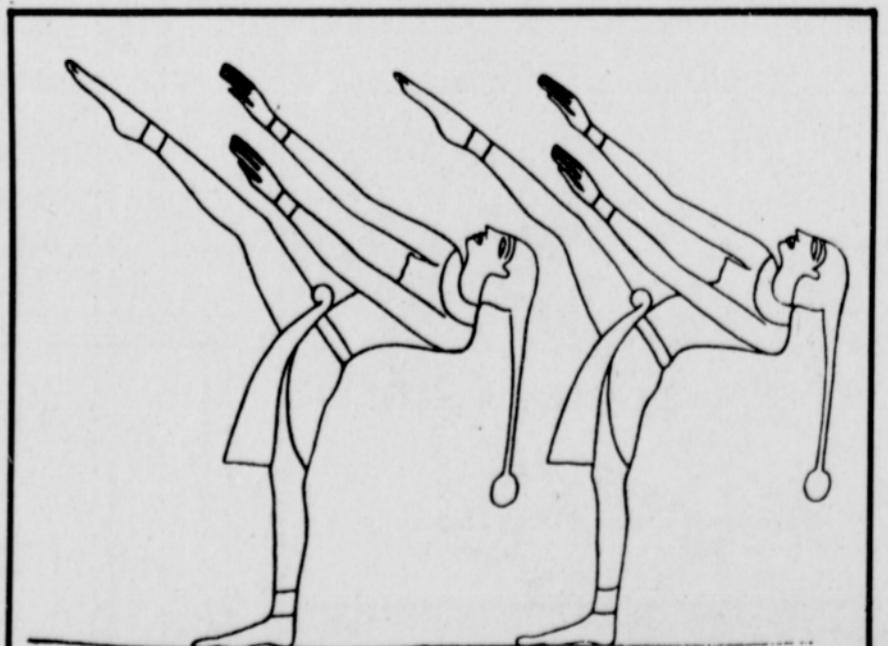
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