



HENRIK DRESCHER

"In an ideal world, immune-tox requirements wouldn't take this much time," observes Dr. Roy Sjoblad, a microbiologist who works at EPA headquarters outside of Washington, D.C. Sjoblad denies such requirements are low priority in the agency. "To a large extent, we rely on independent research to direct the development of immune-tox guidelines," he says. "Another consideration is the lack of data — understanding the way in which the immune system functions is still a long way from complete. And what data there is concerning the immuno-toxicity of specific chemicals comes primarily from animal models, studies with rats or mice."

Mandating immuno-toxicity tests for industry, he adds, is an event far enough in the future that agency administrators are unwilling to offer a date.

"At this time, it's only a small part of our toxicology package, and a very small part of my job."

And, by all indications, a nonexistent part of Oregon's job. The state owns or oversees better than half of Oregon's commercial forestland — more than 10 million acres. And it has the final say on what does or doesn't go on agricultural ground as well. In fact, state government can legally limit or prohibit chemical applications just about anywhere within its borders, which, considering Oregon's unique forest-and-farm geography, suggests serious responsibility.

Beyond authority, Oregon policy makers — department kingpins in DEQ, Fish & Wildlife, Health Division, Forestry, and the Governor's Office — are conversant with the alarming immune-cancer discoveries, as are several legislators, yet none of these has so much as directed that records be kept of the quantity of dubious herbicides showering state land.

"We look to the EPA and the documentation they require on (chemical) label instructions as a guide for our use," explains State Department of Forestry spokesman Doug Decker.

"Herbicides are only one of the options in the state's tool box," Decker claims. "Manual clearing (of undesired forest vegetation) is another."

Yet, in this state, less than one replanted acre out of a thousand is cleared by crews with hand or power cutters. Reminded of this, Decker echoed the ultimate trump card in the public health vs. fiscal health debate: chemical weeding is far and away the most cost effective procedure available. As long as it's available, that is.

"The EPA or any other regulatory agency is simply not the answer," according to environmental scientist, Mary O'Brien.

She speaks with the sort of immovable certainty an issues-divided and increasingly cynical society expects from crusaders — from people whose needs for passion and belonging are met in a campaign of conscience.

Yet, O'Brien is no trend-baited tree hugger. She's a nationally recognized expert who left a cushy college career to commit her considerable training to the Environmental Research Foundation, in Annapolis, Maryland.

After working most of her life within the system, O'Brien is convinced that a government sponsored reduction in the use of environmental poisons is practically impossible given the 'invisible obituaries' of immuno-toxicity victims. She claims the solution can only come from an informed public.

"It's not a matter of reregistering chemicals," she says. "I don't have any faith in the process — doing more tests. There's a seminal flaw built into it; the EPA cannot cancel an herbicide unless it's been shown that its costs outweigh its benefits. You'll never win."

Instead, O'Brien believes chemical reduction goals need to be established by legislation. Toward that end, she plans on being in Oregon this summer to help put the most sweeping chemical control proposal in state history on November's ballot.

A Eugene-based political group, *Oregonians For Labor Intensive Forest Economics* (OLIFE) is sponsoring an initiative petition that would dramatically rein in chemical herbicide and pesticide application on Oregon's federal, state and private forestland. The proposed statewide ballot measure, the Labor Intensive Forest Initiative, would also restrict clearcutting on the same turf, which is probably the petition's major weak spot.

In spite of a 20-year shopping spree to build economic diversity in Oregon — including major affairs with the hi-tech market and tourism — timber harvesting is still the big breadwinner. While that may be bad news for some species of inbred owls, clearcutting is unrelated to cancer.

Well, almost unrelated; blanket herbicide spraying is the

only "tool" economical enough to maintain successful replantation at the rate imposed by clearcutting, so it would be difficult to have one without the other. The question is, how long will an increasingly informed public put up with the terminally menacing 'other'?

Like Mary O'Brien's decision to hang up a career and work at educating the public, the OLIFE petition represents more than vested dissent. It's a no-confidence vote against the system, a system whose science — on too many occasions — has computed risk on the "total" line of a balance sheet.

Tim Sills is a freelance investigative reporter who lives in Rockaway Beach. A shorter version of this article appeared in *The Oregon Spectator*.

EFFECTIVE PAPER ASSURANCE

OR HOW A U.S. SENATOR'S CONCERN OVER HERBICIDE RISKS WAS NIPPED IN THE BUD

In May of last year, Senator Bob Packwood received a copy of an article about the recently discovered immuno-toxic risks of 2,4-D.

The Senator immediately sent an inquiry through his Oregon field office to the EPA's regional office in Portland: "Why hasn't the EPA canceled or restricted 2,4-D in light of studies that show a link between 2,4-D and cancer?"

Dan Heister, of EPA-Portland, forwarded the Senator's query to Jill Bloom, a staffer at the agency's Washington, D.C. offices. Bloom assumed the job of defending EPA's approval of 2,4-D.

Not a scientist, Bloom focused her vindication of EPA on the "inaccurate and unbalanced" character of information the Senator had received. The crucial issue of immuno-toxicity was casually dismissed in a single sentence: "While the Agency has not required immuno-toxicity testing for 2,4-D, that requirement could be imposed when state-of-the-art testing guidelines are complete."

Bloom also upheld the interim approval of the herbicide, claiming pesticide restriction codes didn't give EPA any options (!): "Unless there is a reason to believe a pesticide poses an imminent hazard, the risk/benefit analysis must by law precede the cancellation or restrictions...The statute offers little latitude in this type of case."

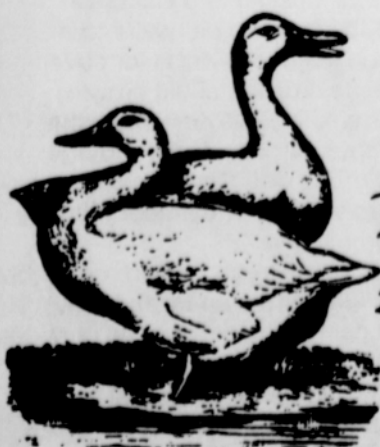
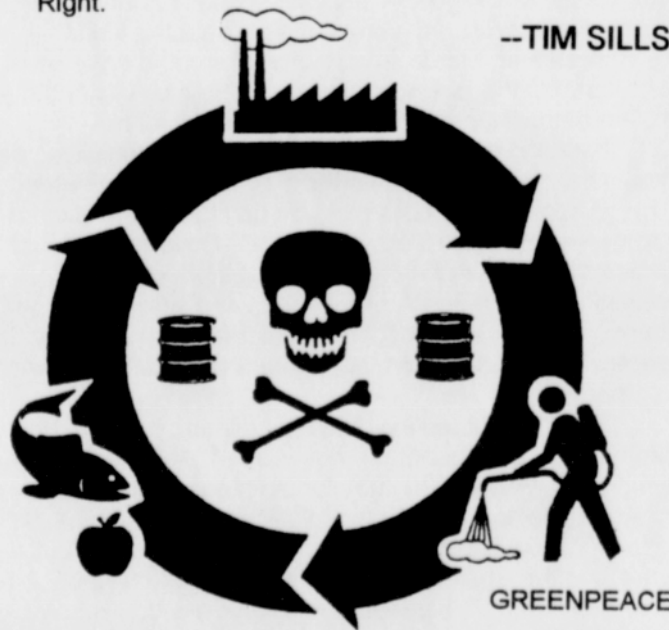
On June 3, Bloom faxed Heister her three-page memo, and the next day Heister sent it to Hance Haney, the Senator's Portland office man. Heister included his own assurances that

EPA works in complete cooperation with Oregon's Department of Forestry, and that both agencies are diligent to apply 2,4-D according to label precautions: "...each application follows the letter of the law."

One week later, the Tillamook County constituent who first sent the information to Packwood received a letter from Haney relating that the Senator had taken steps to look into the matter with the EPA's close attention to these concerns.

Right.

--TIM SILLS



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