

Are pesticides killing the boy next door?

By DR. JUNE IRWIN

Some people say it is worse than cocaine, being faced with the pesticide users and the pesticide pushers among us.

We are a human experiment without records being kept. We have chemical warfare going on in our neighbourhoods. The spreading and the spraying of chemicals on lawns, trees and houses is against the common right of all citizens to breathe clean air and to remain in health.

Take for example Rafceek Ali, age 63. He has had health problems during the past four years, which included dermatitis. He was admitted to hospital in the autumn of 1986 for chest pain. Cardiological investigation was negative. He developed bronchial asthma and by the summer of 1990 he required hospitalizations in the emergency department for status asthmaticus. He required oral and inhalant bronchodilators as well as systemic corticosteroids. Laboratory analyses revealed blood levels of PCBs, DDE, DDT, Beta-BHC, Trans-Nonachlor (all chlorinated pesticides).

Unfortunately, we knew of no detoxification centre in Quebec to which he could be referred; consequently Ali was treated for detoxification at an environmental health centre in Texas. He has shown marked improvement and has required essentially no prescription medication.

This is one of many cases studied which serve only to raise the question of the relation of chemical toxin to disease.

Another is that of Margaret Ogston and her daughter. Ogston states that in 1964 when her daughter was 2.5 years old, the child was admitted to the hospital overnight with diarrhea, vomiting and passing out. The doctor did not know the cause.

The next day she found the neighbour's big German shepherd dog was also sick and had been gagging. Another neighbour had sprayed their trees. "We never did anything about it in those days. We didn't tell the neighbour that our child was sick."

Even now, some people have to stay indoors for part of the spring, summer and autumn with their windows and doors closed because of the physiological effects of the sprayed pesticides.

Since 1984, we have observed toxic rashes and fever in children whose lawns or whose neighbour's lawn had been recently sprayed or treated.

Frequently these children suffered from stomach cramps with or without diarrhea. Some had marked weakness and anal sphincter incontinence. Other symptoms included bronchitis and asthma.

Golfers have shown symptoms of pesticide exposure. Typically they have shown pinpoint purpuric lesions about the lower legs and ankles.

From time to time I have seen some people who have a history of chronic fatigue and mental depression, and who have been exposed also to insecticides, or have been having their lawn sprayed.

Some of these people have had blood levels of organic solvents, in particular volatile chlorinated hydrocarbons and/or volatile aliphatic hydrocarbons.

The organic solvent portion of the fertilizers and the pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, fungicides) is a trade secret.

To my knowledge, the information available to the industry and to the government on the harmful effects and the adverse health effects of these products has not been distributed to the public, nor have the health and safety data sheets been distributed.

Since 1985 there has been much public outcry in the press relating to people being sick from the sprays and chemicals on lawns, trees and houses. We are exposed to harmful chemicals without knowing it. They are still using killing chemicals on

Your Opinion

public parks and road sides to get rid of weeds.

In 1962, Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, wrote that DDT, once it has entered the body, is stored in organs rich in fatty substances such as the adrenals, testes or thyroid, with relatively larger amounts being deposited in the liver, kidneys and the fat of the large protective mesenteries that enfold the intestines.

She wrote that such substances are so potent that a minute quantity can bring about vast changes in the body such as inhibition of an essential enzyme in heart muscle, and necrosis or disintegration of liver cells. These small amounts of pes-

ticides are cumulatively stored and only slowly excreted.

The rate of body excretion of PCBs has not been determined but is known to be very slow. John R. Wilkins and Jennie T. Nickel (*Reviews on Environmental Health* Vol. IV No. 3) describe the effects of PCB exposure. These include dermatologic effects—acneform eruptions, darkening of the skin and mucous membranes and rashes. Findings suggest associations of PCB exposure with adverse pregnancy outcomes, immunologic deficiencies and malignant melanoma.

In a report *Was Pesticide Final Straw in Body Near To Toxic Capacity?* Montreal poet Ken Hertz at 34 years of age, developed symptoms which evolved into progressive Parkinson's disease days after his apartment was sprayed with organochloric pesticide. Today, at age 44 he is barely able to speak and is almost com-

pletely immobilized due to years of progressive Parkinson's disease.

In 1990, blood analyses done in U.S. laboratories showed Hertz's blood contained the chlorinated pesticide DDE, a DDT breakdown product, and PCBs.

To quote David Carter of the Oklahoma Agent Orange Foundation, "there is no normal level of a synthetic chemical in a human being. The fact that there is an average is our shame."

Just as people are able to measure natural substances in their blood such as cholesterol with a view to preventing heart disease, should we not as physicians have access to the laboratory for a toxic chemical profile in the blood, of those chemicals which may cause various illnesses?

Dr. Irwin, a dermatologist practising in Pointe Claire, Que., is an outspoken critic of the use of pesticides, insecticides and herbicides.

FAMILY PRACTICE

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Quote Unquote

"This statement might be controversial, but I'm going to say it anyway. The health care system cannot be a make-work program."
Chris Decker, Newfoundland health minister.