

## Ignoring the (Startling) Facts

A politicized EPA travels a path out-of-step with the big public health issues

This issue of *Pesticides and You* captures the startling science on pesticides and Parkinson's disease at a period when political tactics to downplay pesticide hazard identification and regulation has reached a new high. Beyond Pesticides tracks the science on pesticides on a daily basis in our *Daily News Blog*, specifically shining a light on the range of scientific and political issues that we confront. But, it is not until you step back that things come into focus; and, that is what we did with the highly elevated Parkinson's disease rates associated with pesticide exposure. In the on-line version of the article in this issue we provide citations for the 144 studies we discuss.

Like other disease outcomes, the data connecting Parkinson's to pesticides should give us pause --and then our sense of outrage should kick in, advocacy skills take over, and campaigns to ban toxic pesticides ramp up.

The new information in this issue can be viewed with a sense of optimism --because as the science on pesticide hazards keeps pouring in, and as the politics try to overwhelm the science, there is a strengthened basis for challenging current thinking and regulatory failures, and new justification for just saying *no* to toxics in our communities, and yes to non-toxic practices, products, and precautionary policies. We have come to expect recent events like those with bisphenol A (BPA) in plastic bottles, where EPA is on the sidelines watching the BPA-plastic bottle market crash, as consumers react, retailers pull products from their shelves, manufacturers begin recalls, and state legislatures and even Congress discuss bans.

### GAO to Congress: Take Politics Out of EPA Risk Assessment

As consumers take measures into their own hands, the Union of Concerned Scientists, reported in this issue, released its findings that 889 of nearly 1,600 EPA staff scientists say that they have experienced political interference in their work over the last five years. Then the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified before Congress on April 29, 2008 that EPA's risk review process is plagued by delays, a lack of transparency, and interference from the White House and other agencies. In short, GAO concludes that the agency's science is politicized, outdated, secret, and threatens the protection of people and the environment from harmful chemical exposures. GAO cites a lengthy assessment process, and a lack of transparency practices that are needed to "provide assurance that IRIS [Integrated Risk Information System] assessments are appropriately based on the best available science and that they are not inappropriately biased by policy considerations." GAO cites cases where the White House terminated reviews. The testimony cites the dioxin assessment as an "example of an IRIS assessment that has been, and will likely continue to be, a political as well as a scientific issue."

### Wood Preservatives Avoid the Axe

In a politicized science context, EPA published its revised risk assessment in April for the most toxic chemicals and their contaminants known to humankind --persistent organic pollutants.

Despite decades of review and reversals of earlier analyses, in finding acceptable the continuing use of toxic utility poles and railroad ties, EPA dismisses the human health hazards with the statement, "Where utility poles are installed on home/school or other residential sites, child contact via the dermal or oral routes is not anticipated since play activities with or around these pole structures would not normally occur. . ." How ludicrous! There is a public comment period, cited in this issue, and we are launching a photo campaign in which we ask you to help introduce reality into risk assessment by sending EPA photos of people and animals coming into contact with utility poles in communities. Clearly, the failure to successfully litigate to force EPA protection of public health in this arena, which Beyond Pesticides has done, illustrates that the underlying law governing pesticides, the *Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act* (FIFRA), is severely broken and in need of serious reform. Until that time, the registration and risk assessment of pesticides can offer the public no confidence in product safety.

### Endocrine Disruptors

When we went back to check-in with EPA's 11-year old statutory mandate to evaluate pesticides that cause endocrine disruption, we found that despite scientific concern about human and aquatic toxicity, EPA still does not have its endocrine system review protocol in place and its list of 73 pesticides and inert ingredients to be reviewed at some date in the future contains only 29 chemicals that are identified as known or suspected endocrine disruptors by other scientific bodies. Why wouldn't EPA start its review with already suspected chemical endocrine disruptors identified by the European Union and scientists?

### Farm Bill

In light of these mounting and seemingly unending deficiencies, we jumped into high gear to strike from the final Farm Bill a provision (included in the House version) that would prohibit the Secretary of Agriculture, in carrying out USDA's conservation programs, from "discriminating against" pesticides. With this provision, pushed by the pesticide industry, USDA would be prohibited from assisting farmers to avoid poorly regulated pesticides that are contaminating the environment. We helped rally over 60 organizations in opposition and are, at press time, waiting on the final outcome.

### Doing without Toxic Pesticides

This all adds up to the increasingly dramatic need to avoid toxic pesticides. So, we again, in this issue, provide some practical solutions for managing insects where we do not want them, namely clothes moths in our closets. Our approach is to assist in identifying the underlying cause of pest problems and then advise corrective measures. The non-toxic solutions are within reach!



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