University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Proceedings of the Eleventh Vertebrate Pest Conference (1984)

Vertebrate Pest Conference Proceedings collection

9-12-1984

KEYNOTE ADDRESS—POLITICS OF PESTICIDES

David H. Dietz
Oregonians for Food and Shelter, Salem, Oregon

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/vpc11

Part of the Environmental Health and Protection Commons

Dietz, David H., "KEYNOTE ADDRESS—POLITICS OF PESTICIDES" (1984). *Proceedings of the Eleventh Vertebrate Pest Conference (1984)*. Paper 14.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/vpc11/14

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vertebrate Pest Conference Proceedings collection at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of the Eleventh Vertebrate Pest Conference (1984) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS—POLITICS OF PESTICIDES

DAVID H. DIETZ, State Director, Oregonians for Food and Shelter, Salem, Oregon 97301

The politics of pesticides is a rather humorless topic, as I'm sure most of you know. I've always been told that when you start an address or make a speech you ought to have some kind of humor, if for no other reason that you at least get your audience to listen to you for two minutes during any presentation.

For those of you that may be members of the Audubon Society or members of the Sierra Club, I'll, in advance, make my apologies for the joke I'm about to tell. It's not really meant as a put down if you happen to be a member of one of those esteemed groups, but I do think it's indicative of what we today face. Because the only endangered species on the face of the earth today are those of you who happen to use synthetic chemicals to try to benefit mankind.

Now, the joke goes something like this. It seems that two Martians landed outside a small U.S. desert town (not too awfully far from here, if you want to know the truth), and the Martians descended from their spacecraft and walked into this town and the first thing they ran into was a deserted gas station. Here are the gas pumps all sitting in a row, and one of the Martians mistook one of the gas pumps to be a human being and, interestingly enough, one of the Martian's name was Sierra Club and the other was named Audubon Society.

Sierra walked up to the gas pump and he said, "I'm here from Mars and I'm here to make sure we do not have an inter-galactic space war. It is imperative that we have peace throughout the galaxy. Take me to your leader. . ." and he went on for about five minutes. Of course, he got no answer from the gas pump whatsoever. He turned around to Audubon and he said, "You know Audubon that is the most uncommunicative human being I have ever met in my life. I'm going to blast that turkey." Audubon looked at Sierra and he said, "You know, Sierra, I just don't think I'd do that. That guy looks kind of mean. I'd hold off on that if I were you and I'd try talking to him again." Sierra shrugged his shoulders, walked back to the gas pump, went through his speech again for five more minutes and got nothing in response from the gas pump, turned back to Audubon and said, "That's it!". So he pulled out his ray gun and shot the gas pump.

The gas station erupted in an explosion and the Martians were hurdled for 100 yards into the air. They came to rest in a vacant lot. Sierra shook his head and said, "You know, Audubon, you said there was something about that guy that made you nervous, you told me to be cautious. What on earth gave you that hint." Audubon shook himself off and said, "You know, Sierra, any guy with arms that long and hands that big that goes by the name Ethyl, has got to be one tough son-of-a-bitch!"

In a sense, I guess you can call us Ethyl, because part of what we try to do with Oregonians for Food & Shelter and part of what I want to introduce you to (and there will be brochures on this group, the Pesticide Public Policy Foundation, at the back of the room today and the brochure is called simply "A Pesticide Short Story") is designed to get a common sense re-assertion of the pesticide perspective amongst ourselves, in the public's mind and in the minds of the decision-makers that rule our livelihoods. It's a new pesticide perspective that is absolutely necessary.

Those of you that work with pesticides probably understand what I'm about to tell you as well as anyone in the world. We have lost the benefit perspective when it comes to pesticides. Today, in this country, and in other nations around the world, our perspective is entirely risk oriented. We no longer have a balance in the mind's eye of the media, nor in the mind's eye of the public as a whole, when it comes to talking about pesticides.

We talk, instead, about the risk to man, the risk to the environment and the risk to wildlife that is wrought by the very use of the modern tools that have brought up production and health protection miracles. And, until that risk perspective is re-asserted in a balance, folks, we're going to lose the very tools that we depend on today to produce quality food, economical fiber and to protect the good health of this nation.

You know, it's absolutely amazing to me that we can ban the use of an EDB and restrict its contamination in ready-to-eat products to 30 ppb, when at the same time we allow aflatoxin, which is a mold in peanut butter, to be present to the tune of 15 ppb knowing full well that aflatoxin has 1,000 times the carcinogenic potential of EDB.

That is the consistency and logic of our federal government. That is the consistency and logic of the states in this nation and until that consistency and logic is changed from a perception of truth to fact, we will continue to lose the very tools that have brought us the finest standard of living that the world has ever known.

If you listen to the chemagogues, and that's what we talk in terms of when we talk about those that are radically anti-pesticide, (if you look up the definition of demagogue and substitute "chem" for "dem", you'll understand what I mean) you would be led to believe that people are dropping left and

right, dying from pesticide exposure, of cancers, dying because of birth defects, dying because our population's health is immediately threatened. We are told that pesticide uses are creating more spontaneous abortions and dooming our future generations from mutations. That is what you would be led to believe if you were a member of the public reading the newspaper articles or seeing the TV shows that you or I are exposed to.

The truth is something else. The truth is that life expectancy in these United States continues to increase. The truth is there is no cancer epidemic (all cancer rates, except for lung cancer, are in decline or stable in the United States of America) and that's based on 50 years of data. But the fact is that we have to deal with public perception, because perception is truth. It is what the public perceives that we must come to grips with. And, what the public perceives is that you and I are out poisoning America today. We know that's not true, we know that's not fact. But God bless the poor public, they don't have a chance to know otherwise.

Two and a half years ago, I made a presentation before the Second Annual Symposium on Dioxin. It was a symposium composed of the world's foremost experts with that particular chemical. It was held in Washington, D.C. I got up and I gave a speech and I said, "Folks, if you don't get off your rear ends and start telling people the truth, you're going to condemn the public to an emotional, fear-wrought paranoia and hysteria about their exposure to various chemicals in the United States of America and around the world.

I nearly got skewered by some in the audience because those scientists said, "That is not our task." So now we watch moon-suited EPA'ers in Times Beach, Missouri, and the impression left with the public is not what's justified: That what we deal with is so very dangerous that you have to be dressed up like you're going into outer space if, in fact, you want to expose yourself to the chemicals we use. And, dioxins get linked to pesticides. It's that simple.

Folks, the public doesn't remember anymore what you people do for us. They've forgotten the diseases you control, they've forgotten that you bring us food that is safe to eat, they've forgotten that you're the people that allow restaurants to meet sanitary codes, they've forgotten that we can walk into a doctor's office or a hospital and not be fearful of walking out with a secondary infection because hospitals and doctors have learned to use pesticides wisely to prevent disease.

Those are the things we need to talk to people about. We need to remind the homeowner that the headlice breakout in their school is prevented by pesticides. We need to remind the regular folks that the reason they enjoy their environment, in their home and in their yard, is because they have pesticides available to control the very things that we rebel against. And, until we do that, our tools are going to be taken away.

Now, if you don't think that's happening, please give it another thought. Congress is considering Harpers Ferry. If you've never heard of it, John Brown knows about it, but our Harpers Ferry Bill, HB 3818, will so radically change the registration and re-registration of pesticides that no manufacturer, none, would be able to meet the new registration requirements. Not one! The language of that bill says that to register a pesticide, we have to do behavioral testing.

I debated the author of that bill down in Texas a few months ago. I looked at Tom and I said, "Tom, what in the world is behavioral testing? Does that mean if we've got mental impairments or education impairments or a mental slowness or a speaking disability, that these are the behavioral effects we've got to test?" He said something to the effect that, "that sounds good to me!"

The point is they've written language into a bill that is so vague that no one knows what it means. But we do know it can and will be used to tie up the system forever. That will be the end of pesticides.

There are 80,000 municipalities in the United States. Local government wants to get into the act of registering and controlling the use of pesticides. Name one manufacturer of our chemical tools that will try to meet 80,000 different registration dictates. But, that's exactly what's happening in Montgomery, Maryland; Surfside, Florida; Wauconda, Illinois; Clatsop County, Oregon; Mendocino County, California (they're before the Supreme Court right now trying to decide the question of who has regulatory authority).

The courts of this country, woe be to them, are also being faced with the question, "What can we do with pesticides?"

I regard this question as my profession's Full Employment Act of 1984, because the fact of the matter is that you can sue and sue and sue on pesticides and never exhaust the legal possibilities you have. Last Thursday in a federal district court in the State of Oregon, all herbicides were banned from further use by the United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington. Every use was banned from roadside vegetation management to progeny sites to test sites. Every use! Noxious weed control, specifically said the court, will be prohibited until a worst case analysis is done by the federal government under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Do you know what the worst case analysis has to be? When it comes to the chemical 2,4-D, not a proven carcinogen, you must assume it is a carcinogen and then extrapolate the number of cancers that will be created in the United States by the use of 2,4-D before we can go ahead and use that chemical.

That's illogical in the extreme, but that's what the courts of this country have now told us we must do. That's why you are an endangered species. The politics of pesticides is coming at us like a ton of bricks and unless we figure out how to put mortar to the bricks to build our own wall, or figure out a way to get out of the way, we're going to lose the tools that we have to have to maintain this country's livability.

Pesticides are not endangering this nation. They are the environmental promotion, health protection and food and fiber production tools that are absolutely essential to the health and well-being of this country and to the people of this country, and that's the story we've got to start telling.

I am sick and tired of politicians using the pesticide issue to fearfully make their constituents react so they can buy votes through fear. It's got to end.

The way to end the illogic is to turn it around and talk in terms that are as vigorous and as emotional and as vibrant as the terms that are now being used against us. Because the fact is, we will lose our ability to use pesticides unless we go forward, hard, with our message. That's part of what we try to do with Oregonians for Food & Shelter. It is what we have started to do with the Pesticide Public Policy Foundation which is an interesting creature, because 3PF (the Pesticide Public Policy Foundation) was created by the arbor, lawn care and landscape industries.

The reason those folks wanted a national network amongst all of us is *very* simple. They are the urban environmentalists, they are the people that keep the acres of trees available to eat five to six tons of carbon dioxide a year and produce four tons of oxygen. They are the people that add 20% to the value of homes. They are the people that give us an esthetic balance that you and I demand and must have if we are to be productive and work in a healthy environment. Those folks know that they're threatened. You've just gone through the 1080 debacle. You know what it means to have the government making decisions for you based on perception rather than fact. That's why you're threatened.

That's why we've got to re-align perception with fact, because unless we do and until we do the politics of pesticides are going to win, and the politics of pesticides are: Take these dangerous tools away, don't let people have access to them.

Politically it's wiser to err on the side of zero risk than it is to try to explain risk relationships. Politicians find it easier to say, "You can have a riskless society". But, you can't have it. I can't walk across the street today and guarantee you I won't be hit by a car. But, a politician will sell the idea of zero risk before he will take the time to explain the risk relationships, because that <u>is</u> hard.

Why? Well number one, because he or she might not know any better. And number two, it <u>is</u> tough to do and it takes time. That's what you folks, as professionals, are able to do. That's <u>what</u> people like me try to do. Because we are the ones that must do it, now! If we pull together and all walk down the same path, I think we <u>can</u> make the difference.

That difference will be having the chemical tools still there when we need them. Not only to produce the food and fiber that this society demands, but to protect the health and the environment of the American public in our country. I frankly remain convinced that if we work together and talk in concert, with strength and unity, we can succeed. But it will take all of us.

I urge you today, as you go through the rest of your conference, to listen carefully to what's being told to you and relate what you hear to how you can talk to your friends or neighbors in terms of how you benefit their health, how you protect their environment, how you assure their children of a better world in which to live. Because those are the messages that are going to make sense. I think if we all do that we will get common sense back into the question of the politics of pesticides.

And, if we do, the politics of pesticides will be resolved in the right way!