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March 1988

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LEE C. TRUMAN

*Pest Control Consultant, Indianapolis, Indiana*

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TRUMAN, LEE C., "THE PEST CONTROL INDUSTRY AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD " (1988). *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Vertebrate Pest Conference (1988)*. 3.

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# THE PEST CONTROL INDUSTRY AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

LEE C. TRUMAN, Pest Control Consultant, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Proc. Vertebr. Pest Conf. (A.C. Crabb and R.E. Marsh, Eds.),  
Printed at Univ. of Calif., Davis. 13:2-4, 1988

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The pest control industry, whether it be governmental, urban, aerial, lawn and turf, trees, or whatever, has many of the same problems. Controllers of vertebrate or invertebrate pests, or plant pests, have much in common. Environmentalists talk of the "balance of nature," usually overlooking the fact that nature is more often out of balance than in balance. Nature is cruel in its control of plant and animal species whenever there is not enough food to go around or enough of a suitable habitat in which to live. Nature does not conserve things as they are but, rather, changes them and frequently in violent ways. Earthquakes, forest fires, droughts, and other catastrophes may wipe out whole populations-and life survives and thrives in spite of this. Kurt Vonnegut said in a recent issue of Time magazine, "If people think nature is their friend, they sure don't need an enemy." Environmentalists sometimes seem to forget that we are as much a part of the ecology as are the plants and the animals. Our environment is a precious thing; we need to control and change it if necessary for our survival while retaining its necessary and better features.

The challenges which lie ahead of us are many. Pressure from environmental groups will continue to provoke the public. The media will continue to arouse negative feelings about pesticides causing legislatures to pass restrictive legislation. New chemicals and techniques will demand more and better training of pest control personnel, thus causing higher costs. Endangered species protection may eliminate use of many pesticides in entire areas. Humane societies are, here and there, already trying to restrict the use of glue boards and sticky traps as being cruel to rats, mice, and roaches.

Training in the use of new pesticides and techniques is something we have always taken care of in the past and will continue to do in the future. Costs will certainly rise but estimates I have seen recently estimating the cost of training a new serviceperson, not including the cost of a college education, as being between \$25,000 and \$30,000 are, in my opinion, considerably in excess of what the true cost will be.

Endangered species legislation will probably affect the control of both vertebrates and invertebrates, as well as plants, outdoors much more than it will affect indoor control. We must be alert to efforts to pass such legislation which is not based on scientific evidence and facts and which does not take into account the effect on humans. The snail darter fiasco is a good case in point where millions of dollars were spent in stopping construction of a large dam, the construction of which supposedly would eliminate the only living space of the snail darter. Then studies were made of the snail

darter and they were found to be breeding and living in many other places. Millions more to restart construction on the dam!!

It has even been suggested that we "protect the mosquito." Has anyone calculated the disease potential of protecting mosquitoes which transfer disease organisms to humans? In Oklahoma there is proposed legislation to "protect the pigeon." Pigeons could only be controlled during pigeon season and then only by the use of proper firearms.

Any listing of problems makes the future look bleak and depressing. This need not necessarily be so, but we must change and adapt to conditions as they change if we are to survive. One thing is certain, conditions will change-it is inevitable--but whether the change is for better or worse is up to us both individually and collectively.

Rachel Carson, with all her lengthy discussion of pesticide misuse, made one very valid point: "We must use pesticides safely." We must protect wildlife and the environment. We must find ways for an increasing population to live in a non-increasing area and in harmony with wildlife and natural resources. We must attain an equilibrium with the regulators-they and we are, after all, both trying to accomplish the same thing--to use pesticides beneficially and to protect the public and natural resources from harm.

Legislation is not necessarily bad. We need better legislation to control misuse of pesticides and to keep them out of the hands of those who misuse them. A recent survey reported in January of this year at the Purdue University Pest Control Conference pointed out that of all pesticide-related calls to poison control centers across the country, nine out of ten were misuses in the use of household pesticides in homes, not on farms, or in commercial or governmental pest control. Restrictions on the sale of many pesticides over the counter could well be in order if our legislators are really interested in protecting the public.

I believe our most immediate challenges are with the media, the public, and the legislators and regulators. These are inextricably related to each other and each affects the other.

In the past we have been relatively ineffective in making our case for the benefits and safety of our pesticides and procedures known to these groups, which are certainly all interrelated in the misinterpretation of safety and benefit data. Our perspective has become almost entirely risk-oriented rather than benefit-oriented. In presenting our case to the media or legislators, can we quote research, letter and

verse, however slanted, as so members of environmental groups? Our scientists, who are the ones who have the detailed facts necessary to refute bogus arguments have been, for the most part, unable or unwilling to go to the media and before the public to point out and prove the truly beneficial results of proper use of pesticides.

Regulators are charged by law with protecting the public from any harmful effects of pesticides. To my mind, one of the most harmful effects is the mental distress in many people caused by exaggerated, misinformed or downright untruthful statements made by the media. Regulators should, as part of their regular duties, inform the public of the safety and benefits to be derived from the proper use of pesticides. Such action would go a long way toward easing the minds of many people who now worry about the dangers of pesticides.

We must remember that those who regulate us are performing a function which is a normal function in our form of government. They are charged by law with enforcing laws and regulations which have been properly passed in regular governmental channels. The large majority of regulators whom I have met are not "out to get you." They are just normal people trying to do a job the best way they know how. They, and we, both want safe and effective use of pesticides. What we are usually arguing about is how to accomplish this end. Why not drop the adversarial position? A little more cooperation and understanding from each side might well lead to better things for both. As I have said, we are both trying to accomplish the same thing—we are usually only disagreeing over how to do it.

It seems that almost everyone assumes the majority of the public has a built-in bias against pesticides. I do not believe this is so; however, the biased minority makes enough noise and applies enough pressure to influence legislators to take action that is frequently unwarranted. It is true that much of this minority is misinformed and overly fearful of harmful effects of pesticide usage. It is also true that most of them perceive pesticides to be harmful and dangerous to use. It is this perception which we must address, and we must address it with emotion and political skill in addition to facts if we are to be successful. In situations such as this, an ounce of perception is worth a pound of facts. The approach must be made through the media—newspapers, radio and television. It is true that some media personnel are violently against the use of pesticides, particularly those in the national media. Others, however, particularly local figures, are open to suggestions and to facts. Remember that most news media personnel are just like you and the regulators in that they are just trying to make a living as best they know how. A newsman cannot be expected to know everything about everything, and it is all well and good to say that he ought to verify his facts before he presents his story to the public. Just stop to think for a moment: if he were to be bound to this, we wouldn't have heard of the disaster at Bophal yet. He must depend on his sources of information and they are not always fully accurate. Reporters are not much different than the rest of us; they will usually accept as much help as they can get. Why not be the one who helps them? Do you know your local

newspeople—the television anchormen, the radio newsmen, the newspaper science editors? Why not introduce yourself to them, tell them you are an expert on pesticides and offer to help them if they ever need help in this field. You might be surprised at the welcome you would get and the good information that would be published or go out over the air. I believe that, if we were to use this personal approach in local situations wherever we are, we could make a huge impression on the dissemination of information concerning pesticides. The personal approach is best—continue to write letters as you have in the past but "go in and meet your man." He will get a much better feeling for what you are trying to do if he knows you personally and can recognize your face.

Columnist George Sowell said that "Issues come and go, like teenage fads. The hype of the moment overwhelms any attempt at serious analysis when the fad is at its peak, and the disappearance of the fad later on eliminates any investigation of the actual consequences of what was done." I do not believe the crusade against pesticides is a temporary fad that will just disappear. It will continue into the foreseeable future but it will have its ups and its downs; and with our associations addressing the problem on a national basis and each of us addressing it on a local basis, it can be changed and modified for the betterment of all. I cannot overemphasize the importance of individual action with the media because the media mold the opinions and perceptions of the public and of the legislatures. Surely there are enough good things to make news. It has been said that bad news is news and good news is no news. This is not necessarily so but, in order to be used, the good news must be as exciting as the bad news.

Many things are being done to improve the environmental picture and the use of pesticides in it. In January of this year the first national conference on "Restoring the earth" was held in Berkeley, California, with 800 persons attending. Robert Betz, a biologist at Northwestern Illinois University, is restoring his 100-acre plots of prairie land to prairie grasses each year. After his seedlings have grown for two years, he burns the area off killing the pest plants but the deep rooted prairie species survive and are not spreading on their own along the roads and into adjoining fields. "It's reached critical mass" and is now growing and spreading on its own.

We have abused much of the environment in the past but are learning to treat it better. Both individual and group efforts are needed, but there can be no effective group effort without individual effort. There are many ways we can be effective in meeting our challenges locally and nationally. These will vary from area to area but wise people in each area will figure out what they are and will do them. Theodore Roosevelt had some good advice on this point. When asked by a young man about how he should proceed in his life's work Roosevelt said, "I can't give you everything to do in each situation. You must make your own decisions on what has to be done, and having once made this decision, 'DO IT, DO IT, DO IT!'" I can make no better suggestion to you today than that.

The pest control industry is a great industry offering

much good and many benefits to mankind. We can be proud of the safety record of all but a tiny portion of those using pesticides. The years ahead are going to be exciting-sometimes frustrating-but always exciting. Those of us who put in the effort, the work, and the enthusiasm to solve the problems and to make things happen will be rewarded by a job

well done and by proper recognition of our efforts by the public. I envy those of you young enough to live to see the developments of the next fifty years. Nobody said it was going to be easy-but the future holds great things for those who are able to mold the future and adapt to it.

