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People Against Chemical Trespass

By Nancy Price

At this time, as no other in history, our health and life are at risk from the accumulation of chemicals used by industry, agriculture and the military that poison our air, land, water and our bodies. Currently over 80,000 corporate-produced chemicals are in use in the U.S. and among the 15,000 chemicals tested, few have been studied enough to conclude there are no risks. Amazingly, about 1,800 chemicals enter the market each year.

Over the decades, different chemicals have been found to be far more toxic to the environment and people than initially reported: lead, mercury, asbestos, DDT, PCBs, pesticides, tobacco, flame-retardants, solvents, perchlorate, dry-cleaning chemicals, Agent Orange; the list goes on and on. We now know chemicals that might be useful for one purpose can be extremely harmful in other ways. The threat to all life now far exceeds what Rachel Carson exposed more than 60 years ago.

New Ways of Thinking About How Chemical Harm

The great advance of the 20th century was proof that micro-organisms caused disease. In the 21st century, advances in cell and developmental biology are leading medical researchers to significant new understandings about how our body is comprised. The body contains many complex systems – nervous, hormone, immune and reproductive - and the cells of each system function by way of a complex and incredibly sensitive message system. It used to be accepted that the higher the chemical dose, the more disease. People also thought that disease occurred right after exposure. Now it is agreed that there is no “safe” level and that there can be years or decades between exposure and illness.

One of the chemical classes of major concern today is “hormone disrupting chemicals,” since it is found that even trace amounts of these chemicals can interfere with the delicate messaging system and disrupt normal development.

Chemical Body Burden

Scientists and regulators once considered one chemical at a time. But now chemical combinations and factors such as poverty, racism, continual exposure, and compromised “immune systems” are considered to cause “cumulative impacts.” Scientists estimate that over 700 chemicals are now found within every human creating a “chemical body burden.”

It used to be thought that adults were at the highest risk of disease from chemical pollution. But now we understand that early exposure creates a “pre-condition” for disease to develop at any time of life, even many years after exposure. Now the focus is on the fetus, newborns, and young children whose exceptionally rapid growth and development depends on precise and intricate timing of the hormone messaging system for normal brain, nervous and reproductive-system development.

Alarming new evidence shows that a mother's body burden contaminates the amniotic fluid – our first environment before birth, and affects breast milk – our first food after birth. Such early exposure is understood to affect normal, healthy development leading to behavioral and developmental problems such as autism, hyperactivity, juvenile diabetes, early puberty (with, perhaps, increased breast cancer for young girls), and problems of the reproductive systems for both girls and boys. Early exposure may also trigger disease in

an older person leading to early death, and over time to the development of Parkinson's disease and dementia in old age.

The Broken Federal Regulatory System

We know how business groups and corporations profit at the expense of public health, while government agencies and the medical and scientific community fail to protect us. Industry, agriculture, and the military regularly lobby government for lower standards and exemptions and promote free trade agreements that erode environmental protections. What laws are on the books are violated, and violators rarely receive more than a slap on the wrist for their criminal actions. Business and industry, along with "their scientists" engage in the suppression or falsification of information, cover-ups, lies and intimidation, while federal and state agencies are high-jacked, not least by the revolving door between government and the private sector. Furthermore, corporate control of science, especially alliances with universities, undermines objective research to prove links between toxic chemicals and disease.

Nancy Price is a member of WILPF's Save the Water Issue Group Leadership Collective.

The Santa Cruz Branch Spearheads Organizing with P.A.C.T.

We are all part of a grassroots movement, asserting our inalienable rights, and taking charge of our environment, health, and well-being.

WILPF has been at the forefront teaching that We, the People must assert our rights, beginning with the Challenge Corporate Power/Assert the People's Rights Campaign, which in 2005 became the Corporations v Democracy Issue Group.

Now, WILPF's Branch in Santa Cruz has introduced community rights-based organizing and, in the fall of 2008 (along with other local groups), we formed People Against Chemical Trespass (P.A.C.T.) to assert our right to be free of chemical pollution and to take back local control of pesticide use in order to protect people's health and the environment. This is a significant first on the West Coast, spearheaded by WILPF members. This work follows several towns in Pennsylvania and Virginia that have passed similar ordinances based on legal advice and consultation with the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund.

We began in response to the State of California, which under federal mandate sprayed pesticides over the Monterey Bay Area in 2007 in an attempt to eradicate the Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM). As a result, 643 people reported illnesses, thousands of seabirds died, countless household pets were sickened, and bees disappeared. To keep the City of Santa Cruz safe from future pesticide assaults, the "City of Santa Cruz Local Control, Pesticide and Chemical Trespass Ordinance" was written.

The Ordinance is based on the Declaration of Independence which declares that we have certain inalienable rights and on the California Constitution which declares that among those rights is our right to safety. (Article 1, Section 1) The State's LBAM program is not over. They still plan to do aerial spraying in "agricultural and forested" areas, and to do toxic ground treatments in our neighborhoods. In a world with global trade, there will always be non-native insects coming into our country. What happens when the next "pest" comes to the Bay Area? What toxic substances will be used to try to eradicate it? Now is the time to organize. If this rights-based ordinance can be passed in the City of Santa Cruz, it will set a precedent, and it will be much easier to do the same in the County and in surrounding areas. This is the way to assert the people's rights – to begin at the community level. Visit www.peopleagainstchemicaltrespass.org to learn more about this campaign and www.celdf.org to read "Chemical Trespass Ordinances."