

EPA to Defend Itself from ACSH; NYC Defends Itself from Bedbugs

By ACSH Staff — December 1, 2005

November 21 was the deadline for a response from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ACSH's lawsuit, filed by the [Washington Legal Foundation](#) [1]. Ninety days earlier, we had requested an explanation for the discrepancy -- ostensibly forbidden by the Information Quality Act -- between EPA's regulations and the scientific information available to them. Specifically, they know full well that not [everything they label a "carcinogen"](#) [2] truly is one in the sense of posing a threat to humans (rodents, given doses so high as to be meaningless for assessing human health risks, are a different story).

The EPA, more or less on schedule, responded by saying that they're mulling their response for another sixty days (and that new deadline -- January 23, 2006 is now reflected in the Countdown to EPA Response clock on our homepage, [ACSH.org](#) [3]):

...EPA is preparing a response to your request but will require additional time to complete its review and finalization of the response. We anticipate that a response providing the Agency's decision will be forwarded to you within an additional 60 days. Thank you for your interest in environmental information quality.

Sincerely yours,

Reggie Cheatham

Director, Quality Staff

In a just world, I'm inclined to think, EPA would simply close up shop or radically downsize itself, but then I'm sort of the resident anarchist here and don't necessarily speak for ACSH's more sober staff and scientific advisory panel, who would no doubt be happy simply to see EPA bring its regulations in line with the best science available. Our lives, our economy, and the rate of technological progress may to a large degree be controlled by Washington, DC, but DC should at least strive to be a rational sovereign.

Hamstringing Science and Industry Has Consequences

Every day brings reminders of the potential consequences of irrational regulation. This week, for instance, brings word that New York City is suffering a bedbug infestation -- apparently you needn't be a slob to suffer from the critters, which love to emerge at night and bite sleeping humans (whose blood they actually prefer to that of other animals). As a pamphlet on bedbugs

from a Canadian health service puts it: "Bedbugs prefer to hide close to where they feed. But they will crawl up to 100 feet for a blood meal."

How is the bedbug infestation related to the EPA, you ask? Have bedbugs been declared a protected species? No, but humanity's arsenal of pesticides is much smaller than it ought to be thanks to EPA's constant declaration of "carcinogen" status for any chemicals with the misfortune to run afoul of the agency's high-dose lab tests on rodents. Valuable organophosphate pesticides have been banned, and lest complaints about bedbugs sound petty, recall EPA's far more consequential ban on the pesticide DDT, which has led to millions of deaths from malaria in Africa (a fact noted by [the Congress of Racial Equality](#) [4] at a recent event in the City honoring the fight against malaria). It may be a trivial footnote compared to its successes against malaria, but DDT had also largely eradicated bedbugs in New York City -- before it was banned, largely due to charges it might cause eggshell-thinning in birds.

EPA's regulatory regime has left New York using the less-effective pesticides called pyrethroids against bedbugs, but it would be nice not to have worry about keeping EPA happy as we contemplate our anti-bug arsenal and marshal our forces.

Or, as turn-of-the-century botanist Luther Burbank said, recognizing the devastation caused to crops each year: "Men should stop fighting among themselves and start fighting insects."

Here's hoping EPA agrees -- and will surprise us (by their new deadline, January 23, 2006) by agreeing with ACSH's complaints about their regs instead of fighting against science. Humanity faces countless real problems -- insects are but one -- that would be easier to handle without unscientific regulatory interference.

Todd Seavey is the editor of [HealthFactsAndFears.com](#) [5] and Director of Publications at the American Council on Science and Health ([ACSH.org](#) [3]).

UPDATE: See Update #2 on the progress of our EPA petition, at the bottom of this page.

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[1] <http://wlf.org/>

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