

Toxic Terror: The Ongoing Environmentalists Battle Against Atrazine

By ACSH Staff — June 11, 2010

America seems in the grip of chemophobia, the unfounded fear of chemicals. CNN recently served up specials entitled Toxic America and Toxic Childhood. The New Yorker had a piece fretting about the Plastic Panic. The President's Cancer Panel anguished about all the untested environmental chemicals many designated by them as carcinogens in our air, water and food. And there are more frightening (but scientifically baseless) chemical health scares to come.

For example, radical environmental activists now have the widely used herbicide atrazine on their radar screens. For them, new regulatory controls or an outright ban on the herbicide would be their dream come true. Why? Because as a May Wall Street Journal editorial put it, if (they) can take down atrazine...(they) can get the EPA to prohibit anything. By means of background, atrazine has been used by farmers around the world for more than a half a century. It fights weeds on corn, sugar cane and other crops, dramatically increasing yields. It is the opinion of agricultural experts that without chemicals like atrazine, our food supply would be diminished by about half.

Atrazine's health and safety record is stellar. The Safe Drinking Water Act requires monitoring for a multitude of chemicals, including atrazine. Levels of atrazine in U.S. waters are well within the federal lifetime drinking water standard a level containing a 1,000-fold safety buffer. The Environmental Protection Agency in 2006 completed a 12-year review involving 60,000 different studies and concluded that the current use of atrazine poses no harm to the general population infants, children and adults. According to this same regulatory agency (which oversees pesticide use) atrazine is one of the most closely examined pesticides in the marketplace.

But activists do not want to accept that EPA assessment. Feeling the pressure from the anti-chemical agitators (many of whom are now staffers in the Obama EPA) the agency began to hem and haw a bit about atrazine's safety record and last fall, the EPA announced it would initiate a re-re-evaluation of atrazine and health. The activist chemophobes were delighted, as it appears they were successful in getting EPA's attention to the point they can now argue that the safety issue is back in limbo and uncertain which is most definitely not the case.

Many of the recent media chemical scares, like the two hour toxic presentation on CNN, argue that a) there are tens of thousands of chemicals out there; and b) the current government policy, assuming these chemicals are safe until contrary evidence was presented, must be reversed so that a chemical is considered hazardous until it is proven safe. But how do you prove something to be safe? It's like trying to prove a negative it can't be done. The example of atrazine with decades of safe use, thousands of studies that found no harm to humans and years of getting a green light from EPA (which is not known for understating chemical risks) leaves us with the question: After all these evaluations and years of use, if atrazine doesn't meet the criteria for safety, what chemical

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