Food fears continue to plague Americans, whipped by chemophobia

By ACSH Staff — August 19, 2013

In a recent issue of the journal *Food Security*, Dr. Gordon Gribble, Professor of Chemistry at Dartmouth College (and a long-time ACSH advisor) writes about *Food Chemistry and Chemophobia* [1]. The latter is a term meaning an irrational fear of chemicals in the environment: that no matter how tiny an exposure one faces, it is to be avoided at all costs.

Dr. Gribble points out how unnecessary such fears are and how baseless, given the fact that we are all made of chemicals. He advised regulators that, rather than worrying about toxins and carcinogens of no valid public health import, to pay attention instead to real threats, the pathogens: *microorganisms* [2] that send many thousands of us to hospital each year and kill several thousands. He notes that the modern era of chemophobia actually began thanks to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* which was published in 1962. Based upon no science whatsoever, her work pictured a village devoid of animal life, killed off by deadly chemicals (mainly pesticides, focus on DDT). This was the birth of the environmental movement, which has been a strong drag on progress since then, mainly out of their entrenched chemophobia.

ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross had this perspective: Our publication, *The Holiday Dinner Menu*, [3] explains this issue quite elegantly. We point out that over the course of a typical Thanksgiving feast, each course is replete with chemicals that are known to be toxins and carcinogens when studied in rodents. If these were synthetic rather than natural (as they are), they would be banned from our diets.

We have another key publication on this same topic, a brilliant analysis of the harms of chemophobia: *Scared to Death* [4] by Jon Entine. And another of our publications assessed the scare tactics of one particularly obnoxious chemophobic group, the NRDC, when they tried to exploit alleged clusters [5] of toxic chemicals, when in fact the ailments were almost entirely in their own minds.
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