

ORGANIC LIVING

By

Robert Rodale

SPRAYS THREATEN YOUR RIGHT TO PURITY

Pat Langan was standing in his two-acre garden in Toppenish, Washington, last year when a helicopter spraying a neighbor's farm with a pesticide "accidentally" strayed and covered the Langan's garden, as well as Langan himself.

"I was out irrigating at the time, and they covered me from head to toe," he says.

Some people might not have minded having their garden sprayed without cost, even if they did get covered themselves in the process. But Langan just happened to be a commercial organic gardener, whose produce was certified as grown without the use of toxic chemicals by the Northwest Organic Food Producers Association. Langan's customers are very fussy about food purity, and some go out of their way to get organically-grown food because of allergies to sprays and other chemicals.

Langan suffered financially because his no-longer-organic crop couldn't be marketed as planned. Now he faces costly soil analyses to determine if his garden will meet organic standards for the coming season, or whether poison residues still persist.

The Langan case is far from unique. A growing number of people are trying to create islands of extra purity for themselves in the sea of environmental contaminants that grows "richer" each year. Not all are organic gardeners or farmers. Many are bird watchers, amateur environmental scientists, or sufferers from allergy problems.

Allergic reactions to poison sprays can range from asthma, hives and headache to mental aberrations, schizophrenic-like reactions and other behavioral disturbances, according to Dr. Theron G. Randolph, a prominent Chicago allergist.

Twelve years after Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" first warned of the dangers of toxic pesticides, some progress has been made, especially the limiting of use of the most troublesome products, like DDT. But the spray trucks and aerial applicators keep buzzing right along, spreading a total poundage of insect poison that is way ahead of the amounts used in Rachel Carson's time. (About one billion pounds today, compared with 600 million pounds in 1960.)

Ironically, not all pesticide hazards come from outdoor spraying or dusting. Widely-advertised pesticide strips sold for fly-killing duty in the home give off a continuous, invisible stream of DDVP, an insecticide that can affect the human nervous system in the same way as nerve gases developed during World War II.

Malathion spraying to control mosquitoes is common in many parts of the country, even in built-up areas. Yet the chemical is recognized as toxic to fish and other wildlife. Its effect on valuable insects such as bees is devastating. "Our



home and gardens were sprayed by airplanes using malathion," a Rhode Island beekeeper protested to her state's governor last fall. "The odor of the poison was still strong hours later. Our best information that we could obtain was that the bees could be released in a couple of hours. However, we did not release them for seven hours. Saturday evening the front of all hives was drawing with dying bees. How many did not return, we will not know."

"The high death toll among bees, due to pesticide contamination (500,000 hives in California in one year) sounds the warning knell for all humanity," says West Coast consumer advocate Ida Honorof.

Isolated cases of human sickness have occurred in the wake of unannounced malathion fogging of residential neighborhoods, when people were caught outdoors. What can you do to protect yourself and your property?

BE INFORMED. Contact your local agency responsible for spraying and find out if and when activity is scheduled in your area.

PROTEST. Advise officials in no uncertain terms that you oppose any wholesale spraying programs.

ORGANIZE. Alert and mobilize your neighbors, if you can,

to make your protest more vocal. At the very least, ask the agency to exclude your property or neighborhood from its spraying plans.

Certain weed-killing sprays such as 2, 4-D and 2, 4, 5-T are much more lethal than malathion. They contain a deadly contaminant, dioxin, which "is some 100,000 to one million times more potent in its capacity to cause birth defects in the species tested than thalidomide," according to Dr. Jacqueline Verrett, a chemist with the Food and Drug Administration's Division of Toxicology. Railroad right-of-ways, western range lands, irrigation canals and National Forests are commonly sprayed with those potent herbicides.

In the Canadian province of British Columbia, government agencies have suspended the use of 2, 4-D and 2, 4, 5-T after growing complaints from the public. Similar usage in California is being challenged in the courts.

If you're an organic gardener or farmer whose crops have been exposed to spray, try to get the following data before going to court:

1. Applicable local laws relating to spraying. Must sprays be registered? Must they give prior notice to landowners?
2. Exact weather conditions, especially wind velocity and direction. Spraying in a strong wind would indicate negligent conduct by the applicator.
3. Precise nature of the chemical and its special hazards. Was it applied according to instructions?
4. Test results showing your damaged or contaminated crops.

"If a series of such cases were to win sizable damages, I suspect the problem would just about vanish on its own," predicts State University of New York Professor Charles F. Wurster.

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Organic gardeners know how to grow nutritious, high-yielding crops without dangerous pesticides. Discover their time-proven methods in the 48-page booklet, "Control Garden Pests Without Poison Sprays." Get your copy by sending fifty cents to Robert Rodale, Organic Living, in care of this newspaper. Be sure to ask for the booklet by name. Please allow four weeks for delivery.

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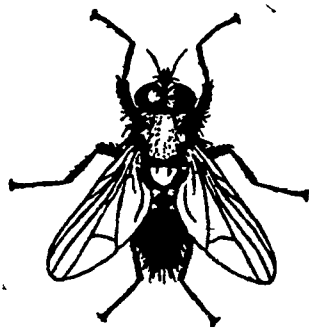
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