



# Art Drysdale

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## A Standing Committee Of The House Of Commons Recommends The Banning Of Pesticides Used For Cosmetic Purposes!

So, our big brother federal government--the wonderful people who cannot deliver our mail on time, cannot properly organize a realistic control of guns, and cannot provide the armed forces with equipment that functions at least a majority of the time--is being urged to take a stand "that all pesticides used for cosmetic purposes be phased out."

Halifax is the first city in Canada to vote to ban such chemicals as 2,4-D--that vote in mid-July was 17 to 6 in favour of a four-year phase-in of a ban. But, it is questionable--very questionable whether Halifax has any jurisdiction to institute such a ban. Though they were the first city to try to institute a ban (Toronto is likely not too far behind), they were not the first municipality. Hudson, Quebec, just west of Montreal (which I believe has a greater percentage of its population as members of the local horticultural society than any other municipality in Canada, as I remember researching some time ago) voted such a ban a number of years ago, and an appeal of that decision is pending at the Supreme Court of Canada.

As one of the "old-boys" involved with the use of 2,4-D for the past 42+ years, for decades I've heard all the arguments from activists' and big brother politicians' (such as Charles Caccia who now looks the part of the old fart environmentalist that he played--not well--as Environment Minister a decade or more ago).

I was a good friend of Dr. R. Milton Carleton of Chicago, the Vaughan Seed Company's research director from the late 20s until his retirement in 1967. In the early 40s, he was the co-developer of 2,4-D. It was being formulated for wartime use, and he was brought in to work on the "aesthetic" domestic uses.

Here's how it happened, as he wrote to me in a personal letter in December, 1979: "I probably know more about the history and use of this chemical than anyone alive. Dr. Franklin D. Jones, who discovered its phytochemical properties and patented its use as a control for unwanted plants, walked into my office right after WWII.

"He said he had a marvelous weed killer for drives. My answer was 'Frank, we have plenty of chemicals that will do that--even old crank case oil will do the job. What we need is a better control for crabgrass!'

"'Unfortunately,' he replied, 'it doesn't do too good a job on grasses; in fact they don't die unless you use so much that I

suspect it's the carrier that kills, not the 2,4-D.'

"This set me to thinking--if it doesn't kill crabgrass, maybe it won't kill bluegrass, which proved to be true when I ran tests. That was the birth of modern selective weed killers."

'Milt' as he was affectionately known, usually carried a flask around with him that contained 2,4-D from which he would drink on request "just to prove it was harmless." Anyone who knew the distinctive smell of 2,4-D knew that he was actually drinking the real stuff. It didn't seem to harm him too much--he lived to the age of 87, and almost up to the end, drove annually to his summer home off the US east coast (he moved to Sarasota, Florida in 1980).

And, is it not interesting that in citing various studies that ostensibly point to various negative responses and side affects of 2,4-D, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development seems not to have listened to any of the well-researched findings of unbiased scientists such as Bruce Ames of the University of California. But they have paid a great deal of attention to two studies that have long since been proven either inaccurate, untrue or both.

The two are the National Cancer Institute Kansas farm workers study on a direct association between 2,4-D and non-Hodgkins lymphoma. In this case it was the author herself who issued the correction that withdrew the direct link.

As for the NCI's 2,4-D dog cancer study, researchers at Michigan State University discovered that the raw data in the study did not support the author's conclusions. That was followed by the NCI author's own refusal to defend his study, and his request that it be withdrawn from the scientific literature. It also prompted his resignation from the university!

I have followed Bruce Ames' work at the University of California for a couple of decades. He actually developed the test for carcinogenicity--reporting it in 1975. Then in 1987, Bruce delivered another blow. He and two colleagues at Berkeley published a systematic ranking of the relative dangers of carcinogens to which people are commonly exposed. Suddenly some environmental controversies looked a little silly.

"It is important," Bruce Ames wrote in 1989, "not to divert society's attention from the few really serious hazards, such as tobacco or saturated fat (for heart disease), by the pursuit of hundreds of minor or non-existent hazards." For Bruce Ames, it no longer made sense to fret about one molecule of a carcinogen. Although he acknowledges that some synthetic substances are dangerous, he now believes that man-made pollutants are generally insignificant risks to the public. He bases this not merely on his own results, but on statistics showing that the proliferation of synthetic chemicals in the past 30 to 40 years has not markedly increased the overall U.S. cancer rate.

One of Bruce's more recent statements that I noted had to do with the fact that an average American citizen digests more natural chemicals in a week of a diet of veggies than in a lifetime of exposure to pesticides.

Needless to say Bruce Ames has his detractors, but in view of the fact he takes no money from the chemical industry, and his thoughts are a 180° turnaround over the decades of his work, surely it would have paid our Liberal Commons Committee to have examined his work in detail.

Finally, I don't send all of my criticism to the Commons Committee--I have reserved at least ten percent of it for the industry itself for not being prepared for ridiculous ideas such as the ban on "cosmetic chemicals" (just which chemicals are included in this--no one seems to know!). There are a number of steps that could have been taken months--years--ago including particularly, exposing Canadians to Bruce Ames' work.

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