

ARTICLES

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DDT - WHO vs non-scientists

Remember DDT? Well, ever since 2006, the World Health Organization has approved it for use against Malaria again. But that doesn't stop the nonsense from the non-scientists who want the ban to continue!

by Art Drysdale

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email: art@artdrysdale.com

Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.



Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>

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Above: Our newly acquired Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) is in bloom on our street-side patio after spending the winter up close to the north-facing windows in the Great Room; two shots of Columbines (*Aquilegia*) in bloom in various parts of the street-side garden including the blue one with variegated foliage and the double red one. Below: Our red Lupines (*Lupinus* spp.) are just coming to their best; and our *Choisya ternata* 'Sundance' (Mexican Orange Blossom) is also in bloom, the first year it has bloomed since it was planted in 2003! Finally, a shot of our lovely blue-flowering *Rhododendron augustini* which bloomed a month ago. Author photos.

I well remember back when I was a student at the (then) Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture, at least one of the very knowledgeable instructors discussing the banning of DDT which was considered the most valuable insecticide available at that time. Just a year after I graduated, specifically on September 27, 1962, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* was published by Houghton Mifflin. The primary inspiration for the book was a friend of Carson's who was concerned about dying birds in her hometown where the authorities had sprayed DDT to control mosquitoes. [Evidence that DDT was the culprit was sadly missing!]

Silent Spring surveyed mounting evidence that widespread pesticide use endangered both wildlife and humans. Along the way, Rachel Carson criticized an irresponsible chemical industry, which continued to claim that pesticides were safe, and imprudent public officials, who accepted without question this disinformation. As an alternative to the "scorched earth" logic underlying accepted pest-control practices, the author outlined the "biotic" approach—cheaper, safer, longer acting, natural solutions to pest problems (for example, controlling the Japanese beetle by introducing a fungus that causes a fatal disease in this insect).

Very recently, author Steven J. Milloy, wrote on his blog, JunkScience.com, in response to an article in the *New York Times*, about the latest claims against DDT, which to some extent, is still used in developing countries for the control of Malaria, following the chemical's removal from the World Health Organization's "banned list" in 2006.

Following are some excerpts from Steven Milloy's recent writings.

"On May 18th, 2011, a *New York Times* article entitled 'As an Insecticide Makes a Comeback, Uganda Must Weigh Its Costs' stated 'But the United States banned the use of DDT in 1972 over the chemical's hazardous environmental impact. Studies have also linked DDT to Diabetes and Breast Cancer.'

"One examination of the consequences of using DDT to fight malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa, conducted by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, said the chemical might have increased infant deaths.

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"I traced the Diabetes Claim to a study published in the July 2009 *Environmental Health Perspectives*. Aside from the usual fatal flaws of weak association epidemiology, this study's assertion that DDT metabolite DDE was associated with incident Diabetes is laughable since the average body mass index (BMI) of the study subjects was 33.2— e.g., meaning that the average study subject was likely to be obese. Moreover, no significant associations were reported for study subjects with a BMI less than 29.

"I don't know whether obesity leads to diabetes or diabetes leads to obesity, but there is no evidence that DDT is involved.

"Ever since the World Health Organization reversed the environmentalist-promoted ban on DDT in 2006, eco-activists have scrambled to devise new ways to malign the life-saving insecticide in order to salvage their badly marred reputation. Their latest effort involves touting a new study supposedly linking DDT exposure in adolescent girls with increased breast cancer risk in later life.

"The study was authored by researchers from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine—an institution infamous for alarmist research on asbestos and 9–11 rescue workers—and was published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, a journal that seems to operate as a refuge for alarmist research. The study first came to my attention via a letter by John Peterson Myers published in The Wall Street Journal (August 25th, 2007) entitled 'Stop Pushing DDT'.

"Aficionados of health scares will recall that Myers was a co-author of the 1996 book *Our Stolen Future*, which fomented fears about chemicals in the environment causing every disease from cancer to attention deficit disorder.

"A pro-DDT editorial by the *Journal* (August 16th, 2007) spotlighted new research countering the environmentalist claim that DDT is ineffective because mosquitoes can build [so-called] resistance to the chemical's toxic properties.

"In taking exception to the *Journal*'s advocacy of DDT to combat the malaria—a disease that sickens 500 million per year, killing one million of them—Myers cited the Mount Sinai study and its claim that 'women more exposed to DDT prior to puberty were five times more likely to develop breast cancer than those with lower exposure'.

"Myers pointed out that the authors concluded that 'the public-health significance of DDT exposure is potentially large'.

"I responded to Myers with a letter published in the *Journal* (August 31st, 2007) likening the study to statistical malpractice. The study was small (including only 133 women with breast cancer), completely omitted data on key risk factors for breast cancer (such as genetics and family history), and only partially considered other potential risk factors (such as pregnancy and breast-feeding history). All of which amply explains the study's internal contradictions and statistical flakiness.

"The vast majority of the statistical correlations reported in the study were either zero or negative—meaning no relationship between DDT and Breast Cancer. Accepting the negative ones at face value, as Myers did the positive, would support the equally unlikely implication that DDT might actually prevent Breast Cancer. Moreover, the positive correlations were highly suspect. The one cited by Myers—the five-fold increase in Breast Cancer risk—sports a wide margin of error, four times the size of the claimed correlation.

"The Mount Sinai researchers responded with their own letter in *Environmental Health Perspectives* (September 22nd, 2007). Acknowledging that their study was small, their primary line of defense was that it was published in a reputable journal, and was peer-reviewed by experts in the subject area ... hardly a defense on the study's merits, particularly given the *Environmental Health Perspectives*--a journal that seems to operate as a refuge for alarmist research.

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"While they acknowledged failing to consider genetic risk and family history of Breast Cancer in the study, they tried to excuse this lapse by glibly dismissing the two universally recognized Breast Cancer risk factors as being 'unlikely to change the result'.

"The final letter in this series (from Randall Dodd of Mill Creek, Washington, on September 29th, 2007) observed that the largest study on this subject found no link between DDT and Breast Cancer and that skepticism should be on 'full alert status' whenever a small study contradicts all science done previously.

"The Mount Sinai study reared its ugly head again in an October 9th, 2007, article by Rick Weiss on the front page of *The Washington Post's* health section. 'A new study has found a significant link between women's exposure to DDT as young girls and the development of breast cancer in later life'.

"From there, Weiss largely regurgitates researchers' results and views in uncritical fashion, including the denigration of the numerous previously published studies that found no link between DDT and Breast Cancer. Although Weiss acknowledged to me that he had seen the exchange of letters in *The Wall Street Journal*, he inexplicably chose not to report that the study results had been so challenged.

"Weiss closes his article with comments from Cornell University's Suzanne Snedeker, a nutritionist by training, who said that she had serious concerns about a DDT come-back in developing countries, and would rather see funding for other approaches to malaria control. Assuming purely for the sake of argument that DDT does increase the risk of breast cancer, do Snedeker's concerns even make any sense?

"Zimbabwe has about 2,000 cases of Breast Cancer per year, affecting about 0.016 % of the population. In contrast, about 1.5 million cases of Malaria occur there annually, affecting more than 12% of the population.

"Avoiding the use of DDT to control malaria in Zimbabwe and other similarly afflicted areas because of concerns of breast cancer is clearly absurd—only made more so by the speciousness of the claim that DDT increases breast cancer risk.

"As Randall Dodd concluded in his Wall Street Journal letter '... in the context of the millions of people, principally children, who die from Malaria every year, even if one suspends disbelief and grants the Enviro-Lunatic Mount Sinai researchers their findings, an elevated potential risk of the maladies they mention is outweighed exponentially by the certainty of millions of deaths, most of them avoidable, from Malaria.'

"The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences study referred to by the New York Times on May 18th, 2011, doesn't even try to associate DDT with non-malarial infant death. It instead only estimates non-malarial deaths that may be associated with DDT spraying, with the alleged 'association' being based on three studies 'suggesting' that DDT exposure may increase pre-term delivery and small-for-gestational-age births, and may shorten the duration of lactation.

"Here's my quick take on those three studies

1) Association between maternal serum concentration of the DDT metabolite DDE and pre-term and small-for-gestational-age babies at birth is an effort to retrospectively blame DDT for premies and underweight births 35 years after the births. But this cannot be credibly done with biased data and weak/inconsistent statistical associations.

"2) DDE and Shortened Duration of Lactation in a

Northern Mexican Town reports statistically insignificant results.

"3) Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) and Dichlorodiphenyl Dichloroethene (DDE) in human milk: Effects on Growth, Morbidity, and Duration of Lactation confounding risk factors were not considered in a multivariate regression model (i.e., all at the same time), so it's hard to blame DDT on even a statistical basis.

"So contrary to The *New York Times*' assertion there is no credible evidence that DDT has anything to do with diabetes, heart disease or infant deaths.

"Moreover, given that one million children under the age of five die every year from Malaria even if DDT did increase the risk of diabetes, breast cancer and infant death, those risks would be better than the alternative.

"While the *Times* misinforms, millions are dying needlessly."

I could not have quoted anyone better-versed on this topic. If you wish to read more about Steven J. Milloy, check out www.debunkosaurus.com .

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