

## Dying For A Fad

One of the most under-publicised scandals of recent decades is the stance of environmental pressure groups – and the governments that pander to them – on the issue of the insecticide DDT. It all started with a book called *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, which alleged that DDT causes a thinning of birds' egg shells (thus endangering many bird species) and cancer in humans. Since then it has emerged that these claims were based on **misinterpreted evidence**. Nevertheless, *Silent Spring* remains the Bible of the environmental religion – and we do not mean that figuratively: its apocalyptic, moralising tone, its many factual inaccuracies, and the uncritical praise lavished upon it by its fatuous disciples make it typical of the holy books of religions throughout the ages.

Some Africans are now beginning to **question the wisdom** of the environmentalist crusade (or jihad) against DDT. Malaria kills about a million people every year – most of them children in Africa – and is spread by mosquitos. DDT kills mosquitos and is the **best pesticide** for this purpose by a large margin. Indeed DDT is the best means of any kind available to prevent malaria.

Environmentalists overwhelmingly agree that killing animals in the name of *clothing* fashions and fads is wrong. It has been clear for many years that there is no scientific case for banning DDT on either health or environmental grounds, and yet this remains the policy of most governments, aid agencies, and the environmental organisations that shape their policies. The fact that they are prepared to allow millions of people to die just to preserve the anti-DDT fad at the centre of their religion is a tragic and disgusting irony.

Mon, 03/08/2004 - 21:11 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## Anti-DDT Fad

It is all too convenient to claim the virtues of DDT in an age where DDT does not exist in daily use. DDT is an extremely dangerous and crude pesticide that persists and moves up the food chain from insects to birds to man as well as being directly harmful to man. Few of us lived in those times, but the dangers of its continued widespread use as a broad-spectrum pesticide and poison became very clear. No one book had much to do with it worldwide. I would not claim that there is never a reason to use DDT, only that its

persistence in the food chain needs to be heavily weighed against any potential benefit of use. There are other non-persisting pesticides and methods that destroy mosquitos in the larval stage and eradicate the danger of malaria. The problem is not the absence of DDT. The problem is only in the willingness to address and apply the many solutions. Death to the mosquitos!

by a reader on Mon, 03/08/2004 - 22:59 | [reply](#)

## The previous message...

... is an apt example of what **The World** is talking about. Look at the amazing indifference to tens of millions of deaths just because they happened as a result of following the environmentalist religion. Look at the way a belief is clung to, and the only response to scientific evidence is to re-state the belief more passionately. And look at the ending, a chanted prayer, no less: "death to the mosquitos!" But prayer is not effective at preventing disease. DDT is.

by a reader on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 00:36 | [reply](#)

## Evidence?

A reader wrote:

'DDT is an extremely dangerous and crude pesticide that persists and moves up the food chain from insects to birds to man as well as being directly harmful to man.'

Really? If what you say is true, then presumably there is a study somewhere documenting the harm done by DDT. Could you provide an example of such a study?

by **Alan Forrester** on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 02:56 | [reply](#)

## Really

"American scientists found that the insecticide increases the risk of pregnant women having their babies before 37 weeks of gestation." That is a direct quote, I must presume, as a result of a study example.

Really. No one says though, including me, that you have to believe it.

I am neither an "environmentalist" or a "prayer chanter". Having worked with DDT many years ago, and not as a scientist, I can say first hand that it is a crude and dangerous chemical. Used with careful forethought it is extremely effective. Before jumping on the crazy-looney bandwagon, please note again, "I would not claim there is never a reason to use DDT". I used it, it is effective. It is something you handle very carefully.

Read the studies yourself. Or don't. Draw your own conclusions.

by a reader on Wed, 03/10/2004 - 23:02 | [reply](#)

## Straight Talk

A reference page:<http://extoxnet.orst.edu/pips/ddt.htm>

by a reader on Thu, 03/11/2004 - 05:31 | [reply](#)

### Re: Straight Talk

It's hardly surprising that DDT is somewhat toxic. Let's play with some figures and see what might be extrapolated from animal studies.

The reader provided a source which gives 50% lethal oral dose for rats: LD50 = 112mg/kg

The long-term regular **dosage** leading [?] to tumours for mice: TD50 = 12.5(mg/kg)/day

**Breastmilk** DDT of affected mothers is up to 20mg/kg of milk fat

Assuming:

3% milk fat

baby drinks 1.5L per day

baby weighs 5kg

This gives a baby's DDT dose to be  $0.03 \times 1.5 \times 20 / 5 = 0.18$ (mg/kg)/day

...which is about 1.5% of TD50 for mice

Assuming linearity that's a 0.75% chance of cancer due to DDT over lifetime.

Assume 1 billion Africans live in malarial areas

Assume life expectancy = 35 years

$0.75\% \times 1 \text{ billion} / 35$  gives 220,000 annual cancer cases due to DDT. Note that this is completely hypothetical. I don't think epidemiologists have ever recorded significant rises in cancer due to DDT spraying.

In reality, approx 900,000 Africans \*die every year\* of malaria.

So even if all the hypothetical cancer cases proved fatal, this rough & ready calculation shows that, deathwise, Africa would be 4 times better off with DDT.

A shortfall is that DDT might cause other problems. e.g. liver disease, hormonal disruption or poor quality of life. Just don't know. However, non-fatal cases of malaria are known to be pretty **unpleasant**.

The calc was conservative, cos, amongst other stuff:

-poisons are often non-toxic at low doses

-we don't drink breast milk all our lives  
-neither do many of us weigh only 5kg  
-we aren't rodents, and the other mammals tested were better off than mice  
-it's probable that other preventative measures/cures will be found before current babies reach middle age, whereas it's certain that people are dying of malaria *right now*

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 03/11/2004 - 18:23 | [reply](#)

## Tom Robinson

I can follow that extrapolation as stated. DDT has little to do with cancer. Little or no evidence of that. Malaria is a horrible disease. DDT is effective when used properly. Africa does have DDT and it has an appropriate use. We agree on all that.

DDT should never be used indiscriminately. Insect populations develop resistance over time. Watch runoff into streams and lakes since DDT breakdown is slow and has particular documented toxicities as widely noted. Mix and apply carefully. Use proper precautions. We agree on all that.

You've weighed the knowledge about this pesticide and you in particular have a healthy respect for it. So have I, and so do I. That is why we each posted. Fine.

by a reader on Fri, 03/12/2004 - 02:44 | [reply](#)

## Malaria Action

The Gates article is worth reading too:  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3127040.stm>

by a reader on Fri, 03/12/2004 - 16:02 | [reply](#)

## Tom Robinson

I don't get it. Is DDT in widespread use in tropical Africa or isn't it? If it isn't it should be: 1 million annual known \*human\* deaths trump other unknowable environmental consequences. Resistance argues for heavy DDT use for a decade or so in my (underinformed) mind. Piecemeal use would tend to encourage more resistance by differentially killing off weaker strains of midges.

All animal and plant bodies are made of chemicals. What does it matter if a particular chemical accumulates, what matters is whether it causes harm. The human misery and poverty caused by religious-style conceptions of purity and contamination seem more likely to have a nasty impact on wildlife conservation.

by **Tom Robinson** on Sat, 03/13/2004 - 09:08 | [reply](#)

## Africa

That is my understanding of it too. The general problem with Africa

is that is thought of as a vast third world country that needs to be treated like poor neighbor or ignored. Not many people are thinking about the problems of African countries and peoples. Who is interested in Africa ? Malaria is only one of the problems and it affects millions but it is not an impossible task to wipe it out. It could be done in less than 5 years with a concerted effort. Polluted wells and parasites are not an impossible problem to address, likewise. Hunger and starvation are not insurmountable. Aids and other diseases can be addressed. These are not unfathomable problems beyond the scope of money, science and intelligence.

It is the thinking of people inside and outside of the continent that is the problem, and it is religious style conceptions of purity and contamination, a conception of human worth that is the problem, regarding DDT, malaria, and also unclean water, hunger and all of the above.

by a reader on Sat, 03/13/2004 - 15:25 | [reply](#)

## **Africa and Malaria**

I have been more than 7 times in Niger, Benin and Central-African republic.

I observed that people don't care about protecting themselves against the risk of acquiring malaria.

For me they prepared a bed with a mosquitonet, but due to the heat, whole families, including small children were sleeping outside.

In the evening, at the moment of highest mosquito activity, small children run around without any clothes.

What I want to say: Protecting has to start with education of the people and learn them to minimize risks.

At the same time governments must treat water surfaces with chemicals.

I was once in the north of Benin living close to a small river. I did not encounter one single mosquito!

people told me that sometimes a helicopter flies along that river and sprays insecticides.

This underlines the need of chemicals as part of the solution.

by Jerome van Dijk on Fri, 03/18/2005 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

## **DDT is not banned**

The resurgent claims about millions and millions of lives lost due to a nonexistent ban on DDT is one of the oldest anti-environmental claims. It has developed a life of its own.

I doubt that the editors of this page have actually read "The silent spring", and it is obvious that they have not checked any of the claims about harmful effects of DDT with scientific literature.

First of all: Rachel Carson's "The silent spring" did NOT advocate a universal ban on DDT use - the book explicitly distinguished between

agricultural use (which Carson did want banned) and in disease

control (which she argued should continue).

The book made claims about DDT causing thinning of bird's eggshells as well as being carcinogenic in humans. The second claim has never been convincingly validated, at least not in realistic doses. But the link between DDT and declines in raptor populations all over the industrialised world in the years 1950-1950 has overwhelming support! Apparently, DDT does little harm to smaller birds low in the food chain (like in the quails and songbirds studies), but since it accumulates upwards it does affect birds like raptors, owls or herons severely. This is confirmed by almost all major studies in the last 40 years.

Read the book!

And DDT is still not banned, neither formally nor de facto. It is still used in many countries in the world where it is still effective - but only against disease-carrying insects. The US ban of 1972 only covered the agricultural use, and it had absolutely no force of law outside the US.

And DDT could by no means eradicate malaria - there is a very big problem: the rapidly evolving resistance by the mosquitos. This is the main reason for the cease in the use of DDT in many poor countries. You could start spraying with DDT all over the tropics, but you would most likely only achieve making DDT useless in the antimalarial fight for a long time into the future. You can argue this as much as you want, but there is absolutely no factual support whatsoever to these claims.

The main advantage of DDT is that it is cheap - therefore, every environmental organisation that I have ever heard arguing for a phaseout in the use of DDT has also argued that another antimalarial drug should be provided without costs to the poor africans or latin americans.

You should check some sources to these often heard allegations. I guess that [www.junkscience.com](http://www.junkscience.com) is a major source - try <http://johnquiggin.com/index.php?p=1902> - or - <http://timlambert.org/2005/06/ddt10/> - or - <http://info-pollution.com/ddtban.htm>

Please check these sources and point out to me exactly where they are wrong.

Christoffer Harder

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Sun, 05/28/2006 - 10:45 | [reply](#)

## Curious

Are there studies of DDT used solely as an insecticide in endemic malarial regions that document its harm to non-pregnant, non-breastfeeding humans?

Has Tom Robinson accurately summarized the extent of hypothesized damage to humans by DDT?

by A Reader on Sun, 05/28/2006 - 23:38 | [reply](#)

## Hysterics

"Some Africans are now beginning to question the wisdom of the environmentalist crusade (or jihad) against DDT"

This idiotic statement, including in particular the hysterical term 'jihad', is exactly the same sort of thing you are accusing other people of (you know: calling something 'terrorism' when it is not; indulging in dumb conspiracy theories - that sort of thing). Hypocrisy par excellence.

by **Yoni** on Mon, 09/11/2006 - 19:29 | [reply](#)

## Sources

"Please check these sources and point out to me exactly where they are wrong"

Christoffer,  
Hysterical people do not want to be bothered with facts.

by **Yoni** on Mon, 09/11/2006 - 19:30 | [reply](#)