

DDT ban means death for millions

by Edward G. Remmers

I'm with the American Council on Science and Health in New York City. We're a consumer education association. We devote a lot of our attention to public health issues, and we try to determine which public health issues are real and major, and which are insignificant and hypothetical—the kinds of issues that we're bombarded with daily by radio and TV programs.

Consider the following statements about DDT:

"In a little more than two decades, DDT has prevented 500 million deaths that would have otherwise been inevitable." This is according to the prestigious National Academy of Sciences in 1965.

"The withdrawal of DDT would be a major tragedy in the chapter of human health, and is unjustifiable in the light of present knowledge. Vast populations in malarious areas would be condemned to the frightening ravages of malaria." World Health Organization, Feb. 12, 1971.

"DDT is not carcinogenic, mutagenic, or teratogenic [causing birth defects] to man, and these uses of DDT do not have a deleterious effect on fish, birds, wildlife, or estuarine organisms." Edmund Sweeney, Hearing Examiner for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), April 24, 1972.

Mr. William Ruckelshaus, the EPA administrator, regarding his ban on DDT: "Science, along with economics, has a role to play . . . [but] the ultimate decision remains political."

A life-saving chemical

DDT has certainly saved more lives than any other man-made chemical that has ever been made so far. As a young boy during World War II, I remember seeing pictures of hundreds of thousands of refugees being dusted with DDT under their clothing. I remember people taking a mixing bucket with bare hands, and mixing DDT into a solution of water before the DDT was applied. I also remember people drinking DDT cocktails. According to one of the reference books that I have here, you can drink a DDT cocktail and not suffer serious effects, depending on the level.

Table 1 shows the situation in Ceylon, which is now called Sri Lanka. Before DDT, in 1946, there were 2.8 mil-

lion cases of malaria. In 1963, at the height of the spraying program for DDT, it dropped from 2.8 million down to 17! Then in 1969, five years after the end of the DDT spraying program, the number of cases of malaria went up to 500,000. Before DDT there were 12,500 deaths per year; in 1963 the number of deaths fell to 1; in 1969, five years after the stop of DDT spraying, the number of malarial deaths increased to 113.

There is no evidence that DDT causes harm to humans when it is used as intended.

The lack of availability of DDT around the world is increasing the number of malarial cases, and now it is also increasing the number of AIDS cases.

In Africa, there are large numbers of children going into hospitals with anemia that results from malaria. They go in for blood transfusions, and in Africa, they don't do a real good job of checking their blood supply for antibodies to the AIDS virus, and in some cases, in Africa, they can't afford disposable blood collection equipment—syringes and things like that. So what is happening in Africa today, in many cases, is that children go into hospitals with malaria, but they then come out with AIDS. As you very well know, there is no cure for AIDS at the moment.

A policy of actual genocide

We feel that DDT has become one of the "dirty dozen" that the "New Age" environmentalists have picked on. When you take a look at the scientific data—and we consider our organization to be in the scientific environmentalist camp—we see that DDT was banned primarily based on myths. Myths having to do with cancer in humans, and myths having to do with thin eggshells.

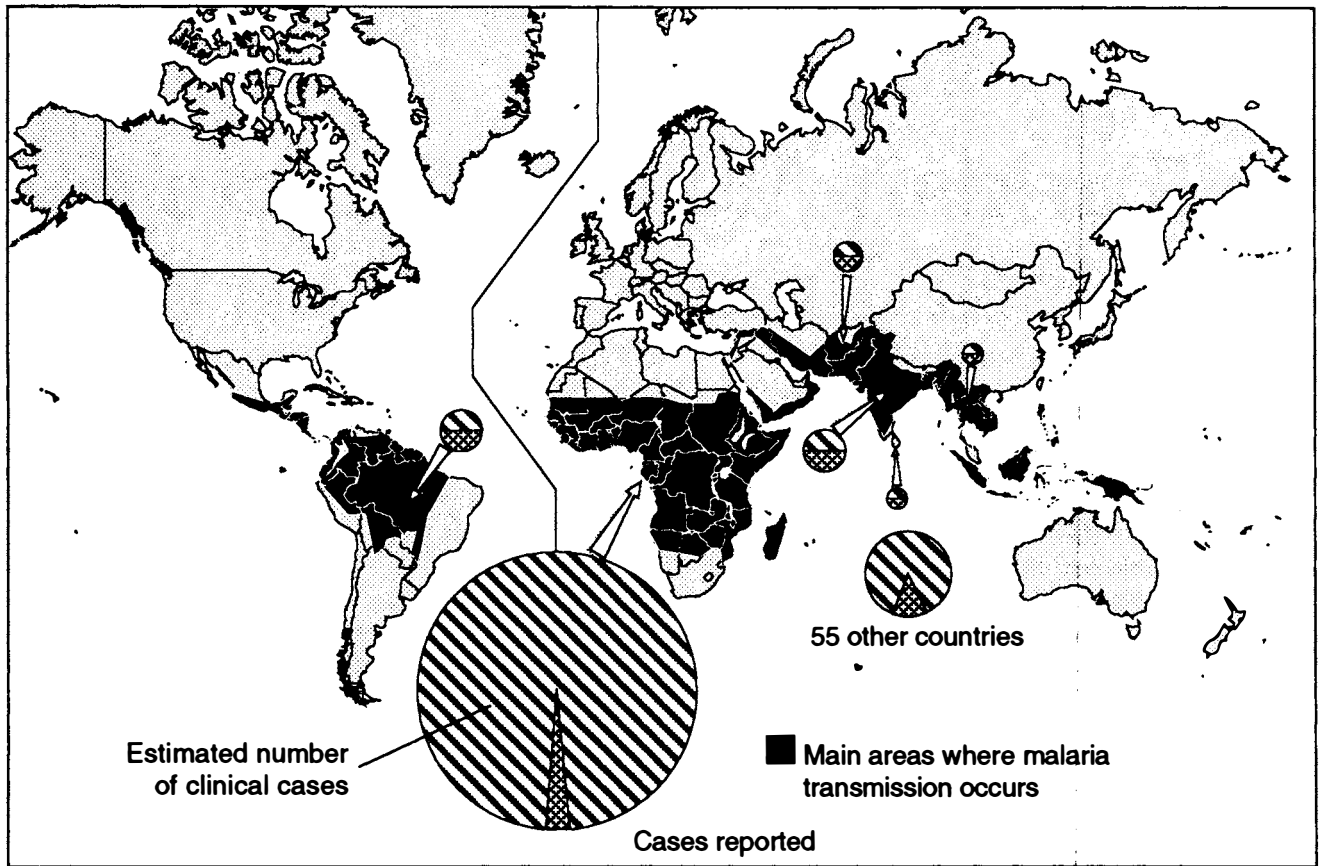
Now I would like to try to answer the question, why did the global eradication program for malaria fail? I'd like to focus on one of several reasons, which has to do with the "Silent Springers." Certainly the people who have died unnecessarily from malaria and typhus and other diseases whose vectors can be readily controlled through the use of DDT—these people really faced a "Silent Spring."

Rachel Carson's book had a tremendous negative impact.

TABLE 1
Malaria in Ceylon (Sri Lanka)

Year	Number of cases	Number of deaths
1946 (pre-DDT)	2,800,000	12,500+
1963 (large-scale DDT spraying)	17	1
1969 (5 years after end of DDT spraying)	500,000	113

FIGURE 1
Malaria incidence



Source: World Health Statistics Annual, 1990

She was certainly not a scientist; her literary skills far surpassed her scientific skills, and unfortunately this book became widely accepted, widely adopted in our school system. We find that typically, on these kinds of issues, it takes anywhere from 25 to 100 years to get the truth out. To have a regulatory agency change its policy takes anywhere from 25 to 50 years, to correct an error, as in the case of cyclamates or some of the other things that have been banned.

The ZPG lobby

Who are the opponents of DDT? It's the anti-population group, by and large. People who are trying to promote zero population growth, or people who would like to reduce the Earth's population from its present 5-6 billion people down to 1 billion. I don't know how they arrive at that figure as being the optimum number of people on this Earth, but there are groups out there that have this policy of actual genocide. We find that these are the same people who are very strong

opponents of the use of DDT. On the other hand, when you start looking at the proponents of DDT, you'll generally find that they're people who advocate a pro-growth policy, controlling population growth with moderation, and the previous speaker, Dr. Edwards, pointed out some of the ways of moderating population growth.

We don't feel that banning DDT, and a policy of genocide that is associated with that, is the way to control population around the world.

Right now, the best estimate is that 1 million to 2 million people are dying each year from diseases that could easily be controlled through the use of DDT, and that somewhere between 100 million and 200 million cases of malaria are created every year as a result of the lack of DDT.

At the American Council of Science and Health, we place human health vastly above environmental health. And we feel that we should keep our priorities in that particular sequence.