

Secret "Inert" Ingredients

EDITORIAL

No More Secrets! It's Your Right to Know

powerful opportunity to promote alternatives to pesticide use. The issue which we are exposed.

The first step is to demand information. Wherever pesticides are being ert" ingredients: used and the public is exposed, activists can and should ask the pesticide contains one of the 40 inerts classiusers if they know all of the ingredi-fied by the U.S. Environmental Proents that are in the product.

current the regulatory framework the label.¹ there almost certainly will be, users identified.

Next come the health and safety concerns. Because the "inert" ineredients are exempt from most chronic the potential for hazards is serious. The burden of providing this information should not be on those of us ert" ingredients."2,3 who are exposed to toxic chemicals; manufacturers and users must be regoal and not current policy.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The issue of secret "inert" pesticide information about the identity and ingredients gives pesticide activists a toxicology of the secret ingredients. Once the secrets have been identified. we can promote alternatives by reis simple: we all have a right to know searching and publicizing information the identity of the toxic substances to about the potential hazards of the "inerts." There are a number of ways to get information about secret "in-

• Read the pesticide label. If it tection Agency as "of toxicological If there are secrets, and under concern," it should be identified on

• Ask the manufacturer, Particushould be asked to stop using the larly when pesticides are being used products until all ingredients can be as part of a public health or eradication program, manufacturers have been willing to identify "inerts" to agencies or physicians.

• Check the MSDS. The Material toxicity and ecological impact testing, Data Safety Sheets (MSDS) required by worker and community right-toknow laws must identify certain "in-

• Use scientific indexing services. Occasionally, identification of "inerts" sponsible. Clearly, this is a long-term has been made to physicians or researchers who have subsequently As an interim step, we can gather published the information. Most sci-

entific literature is indexed.

 Contract with a laboratory for an analysis. This can be expensive. However, some analyses can be done relatively cheaply. For example, an inexpensive screen for EPA's "priority pollutants" identified seven toxic "inert" solvents in a pesticide formulation.4

• Ask NCAP. We are happy to make available any information we have.

NCAP's mission is to promote sustainable resource management, the prevention of pest problems, pesticide alternatives, and the right to be free from pesticide exposure. This work becomes even more critical when we include the hazards of "inert" ingre--Caroline Cox dients.

- 1. U.S. EPA. 1989. Inert ingredients in pesticide products; policy statement; revision and modification of lists. Federal Register 54(224):48314-48316. (November 22.)
- 2. Hazard Communication Standard, 1983. 29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1910.1200,
- 3. Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act; Sections 302 and 304, 1986. 40 CFR 300 and 355.
- Payne, Gary. 1990. Chemical warfare at Knife Lake. Saint Paul Pioneer Press. (March 29):13A.

Uncovering the Legacy of Pesticide Use

In August 1992, NCAP published its newest groundwater report, Uncovering the Legacy of Pesticide Use: What We Know about Groundwater Contamination in the Northwest, written by Neva Hassanein. The 35 -page report summarizes available information from northern California, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Washington. Some of the information has not been previously published, and it has never before been assembled into one document.

The report documents that groundwater contaminated with pesticides has been found in over 25 percent of the counties in the Pacific Northwest (51 out of 200). This figure is particularly striking because only a minimal amount of testing has been done of groundwater in the region. Almost fifty different pesticides or pesticide metabolites have been found in northwest groundwater and ten pesticides have been found in three or more of the five states in the region; aldicarb, atrazine, bromacil, 2,4-D, dacthal, 1,2-DCP, dicamba, EDB, picloram, and simazine.

Copies of the report are available from NCAP for \$6.00. groundwater.



Shaded areas are counties where at least one pesticide has been detected in

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When Ignorance Is Not Bliss: **Secret "Inert" Pesticide Ingredients**

By Caroline Cox

One of the cornerstones of a democracy is that information is made available to citizens so that they can participate in decision-making processes as knowledgeable partners. Where information is not available or is kept secret, a democracy cannot function as it is intended. This becomes strikingly clear in a discussion of secret "inert" pesticide ingredients. As an illustration, consider the following story:1

It's spring, 1992, in Hinsdale, Illinois. Hinsdale is the home of Doug Fleming, age 14, acutely sensitive to a variety of chemicals, and Diana Fleming, his mother, trying to keep her son healthy. It's also home to gypsy moth caterpillars and a proposal for a Bacillus thuringiensis (B.t.) eradication program.

Hinsdale officials planned to spray the village from helicopters as part of a statewide gypsy moth control program. Clearly, there are many issues that one might want to consider in a careful evaluation of the health and not made public, all of us who use out not to be true. EPA's Office of the environmental impacts of such a program: What other caterpillars will be killed by the B.t.?² What is the potential for infections in humans?³

However, neither of these became the most important problems for Diana and Doug Fleming. Instead, they focused on the secret "inert" ingredients. (See "Some Important Definitions." right.) Abbott Laboratories, manufacturer of the Dipel 8AF formulation proposed for use, had announced that it would reveal "inerts" to physicians. Fleming made arrangements for a conference call among a toxicologist, Doug's physician, and Abbott Labs. Unfortunately, the call was unsuccessful because Abbott didn't have any records indicating Hinsdale has purchased B.t. products. Fleming was eventually able to solve the problem and arrange for another conference call, but the beginning of the spray program was now imminent.

Caroline Cox is JPR's editor.

problems for Doug. Sulfites are commonly used as food preservatives, but some people have allergic reactions to breathing sulfur dioxide, a gas given off by sulfites. Documented deaths have occurred in customers of restaurants where sulfites were in use.4,5 Tests showed that Doug, in fact, does have a strong reaction. The family had to leave town almost immediately.

This story is an illustration of the essential problem with "inert" ingredients of pesticides. They're secret and therefore unpredictable in their effects. However, the problem doesn't stop there, as the Flemings' story also illustrates. As "inerts" are identified and studied, problems continue to surface. This article discusses some of these problems and their significance for pesticide reform.

I Don't Know. You Don't Know: Who Does?

Because the identity of "inerts" is

Some Important Definitions

"Inert" when applied to pesticide ingredients does not mean biologically, chemically, or toxicologically mert. Under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), the national pesticide law, "inert" ingredients are defined simply by excluding "active" substances."

Active Ingredient. An ingredient which will prevent, destroy, repel, or mitigate any pest. Under FIFRA, three other categories of biologically active chemicals are included in the definition of an active ingredient: 1) plant regulators which change the growth rate, the maturation rate, or other behaviors of crop or ornamental plants; 2) defoliants which cause foliage to drop from a plant; and 3) desiccants which artificially

Doug's doctor decided that one of pesticides, eat food that has been the "inerts," sodium sulfite, may pose treated with pesticides, drink water containing pesticide residues, and live, work, play, or study where pesticides have been used, are exposed to unknown chemicals. How can we find out if we are being exposed to toxic compounds? Who can identify these chemicals? Pesticide manufacturers, we assume, know what is in the products they make and the products of their competitors. This assumption turns out not to be completely true. For example, Monsanto Agricultural Company in 1991 provided NCAP with a list of the ingredients in their herbicide Roundup. The fourth ingredient on the list is "related organic acids of glyphosate," but is not identified with any more accuracy.6 Monsanto is not able to, or does not wish to, specifically identify this portion of the product's "inerts."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), we assume, should know the ingredients in pesticide formulations. This assumption also turns

"Inert" Ingredient, Any pesticide ingredient other than an active ingredient.² Almost all pesticide formulations contain some "inert" ingredients. They are used as solvents, surfactants, diluents, carriers, catalysts, synergists, intensiliers, and more than 30 other uses.3 (See Fig-

ure 1.) "Inerts" must be intentionally added (not a contaminant), according to EPA, and do not include adjuvants added by the pesticide user. Secret Ingredient. Any pesticide ngredient not disclosed on the pes-

ticide label. Full Formulation. The combination of active and "Inert" ingredients in a pesticide as it is commercially sold. Many formulations are mostly "inert" rather than active ingredients. (See Figure 2.)

FIFRA Section 2(a). FIFRA Section 2(m). 40 CFR 180.1001.

2



accelerate drying of plant tissue.1

2

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