● NEWS FROM AROUND

GROUP UNCOVERS STUDY LINKING ATRAZINE WITH PROSTATE CANCER

Syngenta, manufacturer of the widely-used herbicide atrazine, admitted last fall that workers at its St. Gabriel, Louisiana, facility developed prostate cancer over three times as often as other Louisiana men. Syngenta submitted a study of cancer rates among its employees to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) but only after keeping some data under wraps for years. The atrazine manufacturer kept information from EPA until the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) learned about the study and asked EPA to get the information from Syngenta.[1]

In addition to its unusually high incidence, prostate cancer among workers at the atrazine manufacturing facility exhibited several other striking characteristics. The workers who developed prostate cancer were young (almost always less than 55) and this cancer was most common in workers who had worked for Syngenta the longest.[1] "All but one of the observed prostate cancers in the entire cohort occurred in men with 10 years or more at the plant, and the company employees with prostate cancer worked an average of 20 years at the plant,"[1] reported NRDC in the group's summary of the Syngenta study.

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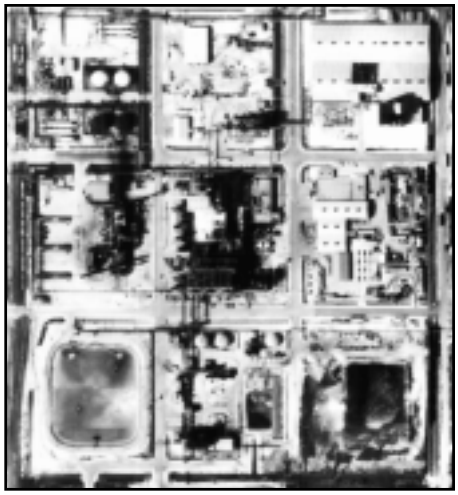
Caroline Cox is JPR's editor.



Kevin Lemaire

Detail from an aerial view of the Syngenta plant.

Syngenta's refusal to release its study caused a critical gap in EPA's ongoing evaluation of atrazine's safety. EPA (without the study) classified atrazine as "not likely to be carcinogenic [cancer-causing] in humans."[2] EPA found that the other studies linking atrazine exposure and cancer "do not make a strong case for an association between atrazine exposure and human cancer."[2]

Based on this link with prostate cancer, along with new research showing atrazine at low concentrations causes sexual deformities in frogs (See "The Weed Killer Atrazine Feminizes Frogs," p.8-9), NRDC is asking EPA to join the European nations that have banned the use of atrazine. In a notice submitted to EPA, NRDC asked EPA to revoke all atrazine tolerances and cancel its registered uses.[1]

—Caroline Cox

1. Natural Resources Defense Council. 2002. Letter from J.P. Devine, senior attorney, and J.B. Sass, senior scientist, to S.L. Johnson, EPA assistant administrator, June 3.
2. U.S. EPA. Office of Pesticide Programs. 2001. Atrazine: Toxicology disciplinary chapter for the reregistration eligibility decision document. Washington, D.C. www.epa.gov/oppsrrd1/reregistration/atrazine/index.htm. pp. 56-57.

● NEWS FROM AROUND

PERSONAL CARE PESTICIDES FREQUENTLY FOUND IN WATER

The commonly used insect repellant DEET often contaminates rivers and streams. In fact, it was the most frequently detected synthetic compound found by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in a recent nationwide survey of drugs, hormones, and other contaminants of streams. The USGS study also frequently detected triclosan, a pesticide used in antibacterial hand cleaners, some sponges, and other consumer products.

DEET (N,N-diethyltoluamide) was found in almost three-quarters of the samples analyzed by USGS. Triclosan was found in almost 60 percent of the samples.

USGS surveyed 139 streams in 30 states across the country. The study is a reconnaissance study, designed to determine if these water contaminants "are entering U.S. streams and to estimate the extent of their co-occurrence." Therefore, USGS selected streams to sample that were likely to be susceptible to contamination. Most of the sites were "downstream of intense urbanization and livestock production."

Another striking result of this USGS study is that most streams were contaminated with multiple compounds. USGS found seven of the measured compounds in a typical stream, and one stream had 38 different compounds. "The results of this study suggest that additional research on the toxicity of the target compounds should include not only the individual OWCs [organic wastewater contaminants] but also mixtures of these compounds," concluded USGS.

"Protecting the integrity of our water resources is one of the most essential issues of the 21st century," wrote USGS in the introduction to this study. Pesticide alternatives are an important part of that protection.

—Caroline Cox

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Caroline Cox is JPR's editor.

Kolpin, D.W. et al. 2002. Pharmaceuticals, hormones, and other organic wastewater contaminants in U.S. streams, 1999-2000: A national reconnaissance. *Environ. Sci. Technol.* 36: 1202-1211.