

C.E.C. NEWSLEAF

FEBRUARY, 1987

EDITOR: GINGER HOBART



THE CITIZEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION'S purpose is to increase environmental awareness through education and coalition activities. Improvement of the quality of life in the Texas Gulf Coast Region is our goal.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

I really felt honored when I was asked to take the presidency of the CEC two years ago. I have enjoyed my tenure working with the board and member groups.

Our biggest project was publication of "The Houston Report" which reviews environmental progress over the last ten years. Yes, some progress has been made. Lake Houston remains a concern as I believe our water supply is threatened by urbanization.

We had several forums on regional water flood detention, Texas Water Plan, Toxic Air Pollution, and Wallisville Dam.

The bimonthly roundtable meetings have been of real interest to me and featured such topics as hazardous waste incineration and billboard control.

Our new executive director, Ginger Hobart, is a real "take charge" activist who assisted in the successful beach clean-up last fall.

Our new computer opens realms of possibilities for help for our member groups. We will need your help to make it all work. CEC has a grand future as a force for a better quality of life in Houston; Support it!
-George Smith, President, '84-'86.

INDOOR PEST EXTERMINATORS: WHO'S PROTECTING CONSUMERS?

When we think about pesticide poisonings, few people think about the exposures each of us receive in our homes, offices, schools,

restaurants and other buildings. Research conducted by the Center over the past year indicates that it is a problem worthy of serious attention.

During the last several months, the Texas Center for Rural Studies has been taking a look at both the extermination industry and the agency which regulates it - The Structural Pest Control Board. The Center's research shows that all too often the Board has failed to protect the public from unnecessary or dangerous exposures to pesticides and to adequately penalize commercial exterminators - even for gross violations. There is no regulation of the non-commercial applicators who apply pesticides in such places as apartments, schools, restaurants, and day care centers. In case after case, Texas residents are experiencing dangerous indoor exposure to pesticides.

The Structural Pest Control Board, responsible for regulating the indoor extermination industry, licenses over 12,000 commercial exterminators throughout Texas. The responsibility for monitoring the industry and responding to consumer complaints falls on the shoulders of the Board's nine inspectors -- a meager-sized team considering the scope of its job.

In 1985, the inspectors conducted only 299 on-site visits in the state -- which means that perhaps less than one exterminator in forty operating legally last year was monitored by the Board. Of

the 438 written complaints made to the Board, licenses were only suspended in 2 cases, and revoked in one. Warnings were issued in 59 cases, and 56 individuals were sent to the Justice of the Peace for fines which carry a \$200 limit.

Who Are They Working For, Me or The Exterminating Company?

In discussing problems he'd experienced with an extermination company and inaction by the Board, one consumer asked us, "Who are they working for, me or the extermination company?" A good question considering that the nine member Board is weighted with four exterminators. Other appointees include the Commissioner of Agriculture, the Commissioner of Health, and the Chairman of the Department of Entomology at Texas A & M University, or their delegated representatives, and two consumer representatives. To date, the consumer slots have been filled by persons who have no particular interest or expertise in the area of consumer protection.

According to one long-time Board member who is not in the extermination business, the exterminators

are the major decision makers on the Board and they are "unlikely to police their peers." The penalties assessed by the Board seldom reflect the severity of the violations and in addition, many violators are never even caught.

No Consumer Protection Standards

The Board has established no mechanisms to evaluate the public health hazards from pesticides, nor has it set standards to protect the public from dangerous exposures.

Although the misuse of pesticides in the home can pose serious short and long-term health risks to consumers, testing standards to determine the extent of contamination, or the need for clean-up or evacuation have not been developed. Interviews with consumers indicate that the Board does not usually recommend air sampling, even in the most serious misapplication cases. According to Bill Elliot, an industrial hygienist with the Texas Department of Health, air samples are essential to do a quality inspection after the misuse of a pesticide.

When air sampling is done, levels

CEC COALITION MEMBERS

American Institute of Architects, American Institute of Chemical Engineers, American Lung Association, American Society of Landscape Architects, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Bayou Preservation Association, Big Thicket Association, Billboards Limited, Buffalo Bayou Association, Citizens Who Care, Clean Houston, Common Cause, Galveston Bay Conservation & Preservation Association, Garden Club of Houston, Harris Soil & Water Conservation District, Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, Houston Archeological Society, Houston Bicycle Club, Houston Geological Society, Houston Homeowners Association, Houston Sportsmen's Club, Houston Toxic Substance Task Force, League of Women Voters, Metropolitan Transit Authority, Neartown Association, Nuclear Safety League, Outdoor Nature Club, The Park People, Rice Design Alliance, River Oaks Garden Club, Safe Water Foundation of Texas, Sierra Club, Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Coalition, Two-Wheel Transit Authority, What Ducks.

To become a CEC member--

Name:

Address:

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My Check is enclosed for:

\$15 Individual

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I would like information on volunteering for CEC.

MAIL TO: CEC

1413 Westheimer
Houston, TX 77006
(523-3431)

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

Executive Director: Ginger Hobart
President: David Todd

above the safety levels established by the National Academy of Science (NAS) are commonly found after misapplications. In 1985, after living in a home for nearly two years and experiencing continued headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, blurred vision, and weight loss, one Dallas family discovered that the home contained air concentrations of Chlordane over thirty times the NAS guidelines for evacuation. In the same year, another Dallas family found air levels of heptachlor and chlordane coming from contaminated air conditioning ducts with heptachlor levels over 170 times the NAS-recommended guidelines.

Applicators Inadequately Trained

Applicators are not required to be trained or physically supervised. Although businesses are required to "supervise" non-certified employees, no actual in-the-field supervision or training is required. The certified applicator responsible for supervision is only required to be available to the unlicensed applicator on the job by phone. Thus little or no actual supervision or training may take place.

A young applicator who worked for International Terminix testified at a recent Board hearing that his training consisted of the pamphlets which came with pesticides and training by his boss on one pesticide job. He was told to mix Compound 1080 and other pesticides and given no instructions.

According to Jeff Tucker, a consulting urban entomologist, "It is often the least experienced employees who are sent out to do the dirtiest and toughest jobs such as termite treatments." Ron Kirby, who trains exterminators for Herwald Pest Control in Bryan states that, "In most companies, the training certified applicators receive is not filtered down to those they supervise." Kirby urges a strengthened certification program with tougher exams, slide programs, and training in the

field as well as required certification for all applicators.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Obviously, training alone won't solve the problems. Neither the industry nor the Structural Pest Control Board has made it their job to inform consumers of the risks of pesticides, the alternatives to pesticides, or how to choose an honest and competent extermination company if they do need to have someone treat a home or a building. Most consumers currently know very little about the industry or the risks of indoor pesticide exposures.

Major changes must take place in the industry and in the Board before consumers stop suffering damage to their homes and health due to pesticide contamination. A program which protects both exterminators and consumers from unnecessary and harmful exposures should include stronger training and application requirements for all pesticide applicators, public health expertise on the Board, standards for testing homes following misapplications, strong enforcement and penalty guidelines, and better information and education for consumers.

Source: Center Report - Quarterly newsletter of the Texas Center for Rural Studies. Sept. 1986. Issue 14.

CHEMICALS OF CONCERN

This list of chemicals used in and around homes and other buildings is limited to those mentioned in this article. For information about other common pesticides used for home and building extermination, contact the Center.

Chlordane, heptachlor, and aldrin (Chlorinated Hydrocarbons) are termiticides which may pose serious chronic (long-term) risks because of their ability to persist in the environment for thirty years or longer and to bioaccumulate in human fat. All are suspected

carcinogens. Chlordane, the most commonly used termiticide is also suspected to cause birth defects and may cause blood disorders.

All may produce acute (short-term) symptoms including nausea, vomiting, headache, dizziness, fatigue, and convulsions.

Chlorpyrifos (Dursban) is an organophosphate used to control termites, roaches, ants, and other pests. While most of the chemical is excreted through the urine, small traces may remain in the body's fat tissue. Dursban does not have the suspected chronic health effects of the chlorinated hydrocarbons. However, some chronic health effects studies have inadequacies and additional studies are currently being conducted to provide more conclusive information.

Dursban is slightly more acutely toxic than chlordane because it deactivates an enzyme necessary for normal nerve functioning in humans. Acute symptoms of Dursban include headaches, dizziness, weakness, twitching, nausea, and vomiting. An effective treatment is available to counteract symptoms.

Diazinon is an organophosphate and is widely used indoors for roaches, ants, spiders, and other insects. It is suspected to cause birth defects and genetic damage and may cause acute symptoms including headache, dizziness, weakness, pinpoint pupils, twitching,

nausea, and vomiting. It has been responsible for a large number of bird kills.

Compound 1080 is a highly toxic poison used in the past to control coyotes and is allowed for use as a bait in a locked container for the control of small rodents such as rats. The chemical acts rapidly on the central nervous and cardiovascular systems with cardiac effects. One teaspoon of Compound 1080 can kill up to 120 people. There is no antidote.

FEBRUARY CALENDAR

- Thur 5 7:30 SIERRA CLUB GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING (Note New Time & Place) George Russell: Pine Bark Beetle Update. Central Presbyterian Church. 3788 Richmond.
- Tues 10 OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING. Diana Dale: Houston Environmental Geological Issues. Library of Sutton Elementary School. 7402 Albacore. FMI: 665-0639.
- Fri 13 9:30 LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS PUBLIC FORUM. "How They Spend Coffee Your Money." Covers the City of Houston's Budget Making Process. Central Presbyterian Church. 3788 Richmond.
- Mon 16 7:30 CEC MONTHLY BOARD MEETING. Plans to develop comprehensive Houston Hike & Bike Trails. All are welcome. 1413 Westheimer. FMI: 523-3431

CITIZENS' ENVIRONMENTAL
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