

NAFTA ban on DDT will cost more lives

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

A “side agreement” to the NAFTA accord, known as the North America Agreement for Environmental Cooperation, mandates the phase-out of the pesticide DDT in Mexico by the year 2007. The same NAFTA “side agreement” created the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), based in Montreal, to deal with DDT and other environmental issues. The CEC is composed of the Canadian, Mexican, and U.S. environment ministers and a public advisory committee (that is, environmentalist leaders) with five members from each country.

Although the NAFTA ban on DDT (and other pesticides) was put forward by the CEC as a “response to growing local and international concern over the detrimental impact of these toxic substances on human health and the environment,” the truth is that the scare stories about DDT do not have any scientific validity.* Any agreement to phase out DDT, is a deadly capitulation to the Malthusian environmentalist faction.

Since its discovery in 1942, DDT has saved more lives than any other man-made chemical, without any toxic effects on man. When DDT was banned in the United States in 1972, for admittedly political reasons, and was then removed from use in most tropical countries, the incidence of malaria and deaths from malaria skyrocketed. Now, in Africa, for example, an estimated 1 to 2 million children die every year from malaria—a preventable and curable disease. Hundreds of millions more children and adults are weakened by the disease.

Mexico and a few other nations where malaria is endemic have continued to produce and use DDT for malaria control in public health programs, because it is the most effective and inexpensive way to control disease-carrying mosquitoes. (Replacement pesticides are 14 to 19 times more expensive, have to be applied more frequently, and are more toxic.) Studies have shown that a small amount of DDT, sprayed on house walls twice a year, at a cost of \$1.44, can effectively control malaria, even when the mosquitoes are resistant, because of the excito-repellant effect: The mosquitoes are repelled by the DDT sprayed on house walls, and do not stay around to bite the residents.

* For background information on DDT, see Dr. J. Gordon Edwards, “The Ugly Truth about Rachel Carson,” *21st Century Science & Technology*, Summer 1992, and “Malaria: The Killer That Could Have Been Conquered,” *21st Century Science & Technology*, Summer 1993.

The current Mexican malaria control program, known as PAIS, tracks the origin of malaria cases, then sprays the inside of every house in the origin village with DDT to stop transmission, drains swamps and uses other pesticides in mosquito-breeding areas, and follows through with treatment for the individuals with malaria. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the PAIS program treated 17,213 localities with malaria cases in 1988, but by 1997, only 2,449 localities required treatment because of PAIS’s success.

The response of malaria to economic and social collapse is direct: The Mexican Ministry of Health noted in an appendix to one NAFTA document, “In the early 1980s, the economic crisis and reductions in program activities caused a significant deterioration in public health, leading to the temporary increase of malaria transmission,” with 133,700 cases reported in 14,000 localities.

Dr. Renato Gusmão, the Regional Adviser on Malaria for PAHO, told this writer that Mexico agreed to “phase out DDT,” reducing its use by 15% each year until 2007, contingent on continuing financial support for the PAIS program, and on the new development of suitable substitutes for spraying to control mosquitoes inside houses. He fears, however, that the final NAFTA document on DDT does not include Mexico’s caveats.

The repercussions of the ban will also hit the other nations of Ibero-America, because Mexico now supplies DDT for their anti-malaria programs. In some cases, poor nations like Belize, which have no cash, repay Mexico with produce.

DDT mythology

DDT is the “mother” of environmental hoaxes. It was banned in the United States in 1972, when environmentalist groups such as the Environmental Defense Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council, mounted a huge media propaganda campaign against DDT. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency convened scientific hearings that went for seven months and generated 9,000 pages of testimony. The EPA hearing officer, Edmund Sweeney, then ruled that DDT should *not* be banned, based on the scientific evidence: “DDT is not carcinogenic, mutagenic, or teratogenic to man [and] these uses of DDT do not have a deleterious effect on fish, birds, wildlife, or estuarine organisms.”

But two months later, without even reading the testimony, EPA administrator William Ruckelshaus banned DDT. He admitted that he made the decision for political reasons; from that time, public perception, not science, became the dominant factor in environmental policy. Why? Alexander King, founder of the Malthusian Club of Rome, wrote in a biographical essay in 1990: “My chief quarrel with DDT in hindsight is that it has greatly added to the population problem.” King was particularly concerned that DDT had dramatically cut the incidence of malaria and the death rate in the developing sector.