

Your Back Yard Can Kill You - Insecticides
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Transcript of tape from Loyola Law School
2nd Environmental Law Conference
Toxic Torts Panel -
Comments of Chris Angelo, Esquire

"Well, I'm going to talk quite literally - 'Your backyard can kill you,' and I'm going to talk a little bit, not so much about the Mobil litigation, but about insecticides because I think that's an area where we have the least amount of knowledge. And one of the reasons why we have the least amount of knowledge is because there's a very close kindred relationship between insecticides and chemical warfare. Most of the information on insecticides is classified top secret in every government in the world, starting from Nazi Germany.

When I was an insurance defense lawyer, before there was a pollution exclusion in comprehensive general liability (CGL) insurance policies, I found toxic cases and toxic insecticide cases very easy to defend for the defendant because judges were then, and today, very very sympathetic to the business position on relevancy in a trial. How can you introduce evidence of toxic exposure and toxic injury if most of the experts are relying upon animal studies, non-human animal studies? You cannot use animal studies to determine that if a rat comes down with cancer, so would a human being. Most times, therefore, the evidence is excluded. Unfortunately, plaintiffs' lawyers never really went beyond animal studies.

In the late 1930's, I think it was in 1937, there was a doctor by the name of Gerhard Schrader, a German, who invented the first organophosphate insecticide. That organophosphate insecticide, if any of you are World War II buffs, was chosen by I.G. Farben during the beginning of World War II as the chemical of choice to make poison gas. That poison gas was applied in the death camps, Taubin and Sarin, the same poison as has been sold by Swiss companies and German companies for the last ten years to Iraq and Libya where, apparently, they have lots of insects in the desert. It was the chemical of choice because organophosphate insecticides which are now the primary chemical of choice in household insecticides was found not only to kill insects by eating but also to kill insects by touch and by inhalation, and was also found to kill innocent civilians, Jews and non-Jews, by touch, inhalation, without any ingestion.

Most of those scientists after World War II went into the private sector, the insecticide business in Swiss companies and German companies and took that knowledge with them. Three months before the allies invaded Germany, by the order of Himmler, all documentation concerning the adverse effects on humans, not animals, not rats, on humans, of organophosphate insecticides, were destroyed. Army physicians went to Switzerland and said to these Swiss companies which are now in the top ten in the world in business, "We want that correspondence." The response was "We are, and were, neutral. We don't owe you that correspondence. We don't care if it was destroyed before you allies entered Berlin. You're not going to get it." And, we never have.

Doctor Schrader was cross-examined by allied physicians right after World War II, and testified to his knowledge about the adverse effects on humans of organophosphate insecticides. Many of those clinical signs now we'll see today. Someone who thinks he has chronic fatigue syndrome, someone who thinks that he has dysentery, or constant bowel problems, is actually in a paralysis, a paralysis caused by cholinesterase inhibition. The same cholinesterase inhibition caused many people to die in World War II death camps when exposed to Taubin and Sarin.