BUSH GOES GREEN; SIGNS U.N. TREATY TO KILL PEOPLE

Dr. Arthur B. Robinson of the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine saw a hopeful sign in President Bush's decision to reject the global warming treaty. In that decision, Bush chose science, not politics. Robinson expressed the hope that Bush would go further, and reverse the ban on DDT, which is estimated to have saved 500 million lives by preventing the spread of malaria before it was banned. Robinson called the ban on DDT genocide. He said a reversal of the ban on DDT would undermine the radical environmental movement, perhaps resulting in its collapse. "Reversal is difficult," he wrote, "because DDT has been so completely demonized. There is, however, now a chance."

That chance is now gone, after Bush decided to endorse a global ban on DDT through the United Nations "POPS" treaty to ban "Persistent Organic Pollutants." He made the announcement on the eve of Earth Day, in an action widely interpreted as an attempt to make himself look "green." This came after the Administration had been beaten up by the media and the environmentalists on such issues as arsenic in drinking water. Rather than do the right thing -- reverse the ban on DDT -- Bush decided to pander to those attacking him.

In his announcement, Bush said the chemicals banned by the treaty were "dangerous," and that the ban was "based on solid scientific information." That is just not true. The science shows the value of DDT. Dr. Robinson says the campaign against DDT coincided with the rise of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the modern environmental movement. It was a campaign marked by deliberate falsehoods. The EPA itself had concluded that DDT was harmless to he environment and was a beneficial substance. The book that spearheaded the demonization of DDT was Silent Spring by Rachel Carson.

A graph showing the spraying of DDT with cases of malaria demonstrates that as DDT was phased out, malaria has risen dramatically. Malaria now afflicts 250 million adults and kills about 3 million children a year. Robinson said about Bush that he is a decent and well-meaning man, and that if he was just given he facts, he would do the right thing. Robinson said, "Another child's life - every twelve seconds - depends on it."

Well, Bush has now done the wrong thing. He has panicked under the assault of the media and the environmentalists. This sets a dangerous precedent. Now we are even reading that Bush is re-thinking his rejection of the global warming treaty. If Bush can be stampeded into endorsing this measure, perhaps he can be pressured by the left into supporting other dangerous treaties, such as the one creating an International Criminal court.

As usual, media coverage on this issue was terrible. The New York Times called the chemicals outlawed by the treaty "lethal." The Washington Post called them "dangerous." Both the Times and Post highlighted the reaction of the radical environmentalists who had been beating up on the president. They were pleased by what he did. Only the Washington Times featured criticism of Bush from the right -- from Fred Smith of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, who said endorsing the treaty was a big mistake. (30)

* Viable alternatives exist for virtually all known uses and sources of the targeted chemicals.

THE HUMAN FACE OF DIOXIN: LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA AND PPG

Here, in the United States, Mossville, Louisiana, a town in the Lake Charles region and home of 90% of the nation's polyvinyl factories will be a major focus in this intensive toxic elimination campaign. One of these corporate polluters, PPG is the 6th greatest cancer risk source.

Diane Prince
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Read a personal account from a victim of the pollution in Louisiana.

Since polyvinyl factories produce dioxin, dioxin levels in residents of this impoverished African American community are nine times higher than the U.S. national average. Cancer statistics in this region are so high that it has been dubbed "cancer alley" by the media.

Diane and David Prince have been residents in Mossville, Louisiana for more than a decade, living just 40 feet from Condea Vista, a vinyl plant which produces the worst toxin known to science - dioxin. Both are members of Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN), and Diane Prince is the founder of Mothers of Mossville (MOM).

Although Diane is currently battling cancer and too sick to travel, her husband David is part of a delegation joining Greenpeace at the conference in Johannesburg to negotiate a global and legally binding ban on a toxic group of chemicals called persistent organic pollutants (POPS). Read David Prince's testimony at the meeting.

THE NEED FOR A TREATY

Since World War II, more than 100,000 chemicals have been introduced and are in use world-wide with the number and amount used still increasing. There is now hard scientific evidence that the worst of these toxics, persistent organic pollutants, are deadly in small amounts, travel long distances via air currents, cause life threatening illnesses, and endanger people and wildlife all over the world. For example, dioxin (a persistent organic pollutant resulting from chlorine production) was sited in a 1985 report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as "the most potent carcinogen ever tested in a laboratory." In addition, scientists know that these pollutants migrate towards polar environments and have contaminated the food chain and the indigenous people who live there.

Recognizing that these persistent organic pollutants (pops) are circulating the globe and can be found in the bodies of every human and animal on the planet. The United Nations Environmental Council mandated the world governments to create a legally binding treaty banning the worst of these pollutants.

THE POLITICS

Unfortunately some of the industrialized nations and producers and traders of toxics, including the United States, Australia, and

toxics

government

Government — The Power to Help and to Harm

Governments play a crucial role in determining the safety of our air, our land and our water. By enacting laws, government has the power to restrict industries' toxic contamination of the environment, thereby protecting the health of the nation's citizens.

"Pregnant" Greenpeace activists in Montreal urge the United Nations to protect the health of the unborn by eliminating POPs from the environment.
Photo © Simard/Greenpeace 1998

Recent governmental action in the area of toxics includes a United Nation's effort to forge a global treaty to eliminate persistent organic pollutants (POPs) which contaminate the planet. The U.S. signed the treaty on May 23rd.

Can the POPs Treaty Promise a Toxic-Free Future?

As a result of the efforts of citizens from every corner of the Earth, the United Nations Environment Programme began meetings in Washington D.C. in 1995 that lead to an historic treaty in December, 2000 in Johannesburg, South Africa. See United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for more information, or visit the International POPs Elimination Network.

At the meeting in South Africa, 122 countries agreed to a POPs treaty that would begin by phasing out 12 POPs that have spread across the globe and now contaminate our food and body tissue.

In particular, the POPs treaty calls for the phase out of substances such as PCBs and DDT. It also calls for the elimination of accidental by-products such as dioxins and furans. In addition, the treaty recommends the use of alternative substances and processes to prevent the formation of these by-products and invokes the precautionary principle.

The U.S. EPA and the World Health Organization have determined that dioxin is a human carcinogen and one of the most toxic pollutants in the world. Dioxin is now found in the food and bodies of virtually all Americans and may cause serious health effects, including possibly cancer, diabetes, endometriosis, immune system dysfunction and reproductive impairment.

Fortunately, dioxin contamination can be prevented and the POPs

current features

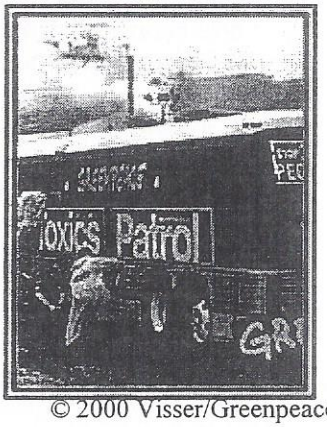
a global ban on toxic chemicals: from louisiana to south africa

Greenpeace Acts Locally in Actions Targeting Chemical Company PPG. We also traveled to Negotiations in South Africa to Demand Strong Global Treaty.

RECENT ACTION IN LOUSIANA

Greenpeace activists blocked shipments of toxic vinyl chloride outside the PPG plant in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Two buses locked to railroad tracks leading into the plant entrance. 11 activists were arrested.

Find out more and view the photos.



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TREATY NEGOTIATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A VICTORY

Negotiations by more than 120 countries, including the United States, for a global and legally binding treaty for the elimination of a group of life threatening chemicals called POPS (persistent organic pollutants) opened December 4th in South Africa. The final signing of the treaty is scheduled for May 2001 in Stockholm, Sweden.

The U.S. finally agreed to a global, binding treaty that will phase out some of the most dangerous chemicals on earth. Greenpeace applauded the final draft of the land mark treaty, which will phase out persistent organic pollutants, also called POPS.

Find out more and view the photos of activities at the Negotiations.

THE TARGETED CHEMICALS

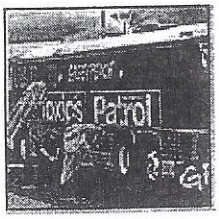
Currently the treaty focuses on 12 of the most deadly chemicals. They include eight pesticides: aldrin, endrin, toxaphene, chlordane, dieldrin, heptachlor, mirex, DDT; two industrial chemicals, hexachlorobenzene and PCBs, and two unintentional by- products of industry, dioxins and furans. The treaty will include an addendum to add more persistent organic pollutants in the future.*

treaty calls for just that. The Treaty's mandate is to start by phasing out the 12 worst POPs of which dioxin is one of the most threatening to global human health. On May 23, the Treaty, called the Stockholm Convention, was signed by 122 nations in Sweden. EPA Chief, Christine Todd Whitman, signed on behalf of the United States. The Bush Administration has embraced this Treaty and said it will work for rapid ratification in the U.S. Senate and implementation by the EPA. Immediately after ratification, implementation must include:

- Applying a moratorium on all new vinyl chloride facilities in the US. These facilities, concentrated in Louisiana and Texas, are notorious polluters and violators. This industry also contributes a large burden of dioxin by making the feedstock for PVC plastics (PVC plastic products create even more dioxins when they are burned in incinerators). These vinyl facilities may also be in violation of the Civil Rights Act due to the disproportionate health and economic impacts on low income African American communities where many of them have been located.

- **Publicly release** EPA's 10 year dioxin assessment begun under the Bush Administration in 1991. It was due to be completed in 1995. Late last year the EPA expected to release it in March, 2001, this date has now been pushed to June. It is now being held up by the last of several review panels. Some of these reviewers have received funding from dioxin producing industries. No further delays in the release of this study are justified and these scientific findings will in turn support stronger policies toward dioxin elimination.

- **Implementation** of the EPA National Ombudsman's recommendation to immediately halt the operation of the WTI -- Von Roll hazardous waste incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio for at least 6 months while its safety and legality are investigated. This facility is located 1,100 feet from an elementary school. Ohio law changed just months after it was permitted, prohibiting the siting of any incinerator within 2,000 feet of a school. That original permit expired in 1995 and the renewal may not be decided until 2002. Since 1993, the facility has had dozens of fires, two explosions and has been cited for more than 130 violations. The American people deserve reassurance that toxic waste incinerators will not be located adjacent to elementary schools or populated areas of any kind.



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- Read the current feature, [illegible]

- Read the press release, Over 90 Countries Sign First Global Treaty Banning Toxic Chemicals

- Contact your Senator and ask that they ratify the POPs Treaty

Toxic-waste disposal has generated demonstrations in many communities across the country.[38] The first national protest by blacks on the hazardous-waste issue occurred in 1982. demonstrations and protests were triggered after Warren County, North Carolina, which is mostly black, was selected as the burial site for more than 32,000 cubic yards of soil contaminated with highly toxic PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). The soil had been illegally dumped along the roadways in fourteen North Carolina counties in 1978.

What was the source of the PCBs? The PCBs originated from the Raleigh-based Ward Transfer Company. A Jamestown, New York, trucking operation owned by Robert J. Burns obtained the PCB-laced oil from the Ward Transfer Company for resale. Faced with economic loss as a result of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ban on resale of the toxic oil in 1979, the waste haulers chose the cheap way out by illegally dumping it along North Carolina's roadways. Burns and Ward were subsequently sent to jail for the criminal dumping of the tainted oil.[39]

This dumping was the largest PCB spill ever documented in the United States. More than 30,000 gallons of PCB-laced oil was left on 210 miles of roadway in the state for four years before the federal EPA and the state of North Carolina began clean-up activities. In 1982, after months of deliberations and a questionable site selection exercise, North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt in 1982 decided to bury the contaminated soil in the community of Afton located in Warren County. Local citizens later tagged the site "Hunt's Dump."

The Afton community is more than 84 percent black. Warren County has the highest percentage of blacks in the state and is one of the poorest counties in North Carolina. The county had a population of 16,232 in 1980. Blacks composed 63.7 percent of the county population and 24.2 percent of the state population. Per capita income for Warren County residents was $6,984 in 1982 compared with $9,283 for the state. The county ranked ninety-second out of 100 counties in median family income in 1980. The county unemployment rate was 13.3 percent in 1982 and 1983. More than 42 percent of the county's workforce commute out of the county for employment. Although the county lags far behind the rest of the state on a number of economic indicators, over three-fourths of Warren County residents own their homes. More than 78 percent of the whites and 64 percent of the blacks own their homes (nationally only 45 percent of blacks are home owners).[40]

Why was Warren County selected as the PCB landfill site? The decision made more political sense than environmental sense. In *Science for the People*, Ken Geiser and Gerry Waneck described the Warren County PCB siting decision:

> The site at Afton was not even scientifically the most suitable. The water table of Afton, North Carolina, (site of the landfill) is only 5-10 feet below the surface, and the residents of the community derive all of their drinking water from local wells. Only the most optimistic could believe that the Afton landfill will not eventually leach into the groundwater. Unless a more permanent solution is found, it will only be a matter of time before the PCBs end up in these people's wells.[41]

Black civil rights activists, political leaders, and area residents marched and protested against the construction of the Warren County PCB landfill. Dr. Charles E. Cobb, who was director of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice in 1982, voiced his strong opposition to the Warren County PCB landfill and other siting decisions that make blacks and the poor bear a heavier burden than other communities. His directive to blacks was clear:

> We must move in a swift and determined manner to stop yet another breach of civil rights. We cannot allow this national trend to continue. If it means that every jail in this country must be filled, then I say let it be. The depositing of toxic wastes within the black community is no less than attempted genocide.[42]

Local county residents did organize. They formed the Warren County Citizens Concerned About PCBs. This time local citizens were not standing alone. Grassroots groups were joined by national civil rights leaders, black elected officials, environmental activists, and labor leaders. For example, Reverend Leon White of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, Reverends Joseph Lowery and Ben Chavis and Fred Taylor of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, District of Columbia Delegate Walter Fauntroy of the Congressional Black Caucus, and some 500 loyal supporters were able to focus the national limelight on the tiny black town of Afton.

The protests, however, did not stop the trucks from rolling in and dumping their loads. The state began hauling more than 6,000 truckloads of the PCB-contaminated soil to the landfills in mid-september of 1982. Just two weeks later, more than 414 protesters had been arrested. The protest demonstrations in Warren County marked the first time anyone in the United States had been jailed trying to halt a toxic waste landfill.[*43*]

The Warren County protesters even got encouragement from the chief of EPA's hazardous waste implementation branch, William Sanjour. He urged the demonstrators to "keep doing what you are doing."[*44*] The EPA official questioned the disposal method selected over the alternatives (incineration and on-site neutralization) Sanjour's remarks at a rally at John Graham School in Warrenton reinforced what many of the protesters had suspected all along:

> Landfilling is cheap. It is cheaper than the alternative. The people who like to use landfills such as chemical industries are very powerful. No amount of science, truth, knowledge or facts goes into making this decision. It is a purely political decision. What they listen to is pressure.[*45*]

Residents of Warren County were searching for guarantees that the state was not creating a future "superfund" site that would threaten nearby residents. Of course, no guarantees could be given since there is no such thing as a 100-percent safe hazardous-waste landfill--one that will not eventually leak. The question is not *if* the facility will leak but *when* the facility will leak PCBs into the environment.

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PCBs

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Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are a family of 209 chemical compounds for which there are no known natural sources. Even though PCBs are no longer commercially produced in the United States, high levels of the chemicals remain in various parts of the country, in poultry, and in fish. This fact sheet will discuss what PCBs are, why they were so prominent, and why threats may still remain.

What are PCBs?

A phenyl is a univalent radical with a chemical equation of C_6H_5 (six carbon, five hydrogen atoms) with the symbol Ph. Valent refers to the measure of capacity to combine the number of atoms of hydrogen with one atom of chemical element in a reaction: a univalent is capable of replacing or combining with one atom of hydrogen or its equivalent. Radicals are a group of atoms that enter into and go out of chemical combinations without change. A radical forms one of the fundamental constituents of a molecule.

A biphenyl molecule is comprised of two benzene rings of hydrogen and carbon atoms. Benzene rings serve as the building blocks of petroleum, gasoline, and other fuels. These molecules are extremely flammable. By substituting chlorine for hydrogen atoms, the molecule becomes flame-resistant. Chlorinated biphenyls are any of a group of substances in which chlorine replaces hydrogen. Molecules with more than 1 chlorine atom are known as polychlorinated biphenyls. Polychlorinated biphenyls are toxic and accumulate in animal tissues.

The flame resistance of the polychlorinated biphenyls made them ideal for use in electrical products because they did not burn, break down, or react with other chemicals. Originally produced for use as flame retardants and as electrical insulators in transformers, capacitors, and other electrical equipment, PCBs were used in heating coils, carbonless carbon paper, lubricating oils for industrial

drills, caulking compounds for skyscraper windows, electrical motors in refrigerators, in air conditioners, typewriters, power saws, and the like. At one time or another, a wide variety of products including cereal boxes, degreasers, varnishes, lacquers, waterproofing materials, and bread wrappers used PCBs. The unique properties of PCBs allowed them to be used in the manufacturing of many common products such as plastics, adhesives, paints, and varnishes. Between 1930 and 1970, 1.4 billion pounds of PCBs were manufactured in the United States.

In consistency, PCBs range from light oily fluids to greasy or waxy substances and are clear to yellow in color. During their manufacture and use, PCBs were released into the atmosphere through sewers, smokestacks, weathering of asphalt and other substances containing PCBs, and burning PCB-containing products. PCBs continue to be released from leakage of old equipment, leaching from landfills, and from previously contaminated sediments.

What happens to PCBs in the environment?

The very characteristic of the PCBs that made them wonderful for use in manufacturing makes them problematic in the environment. PCBs are very persistent: they are generally unalterable by microorganisms or by chemical reaction (they do not readily degrade). The stable nature of PCBs also lends to accumulation in the fatty tissues of animals once the PCBs are released into the environment. These accumulations increase as the tissue from contaminated animals moves through the food web. Because of bioaccumulation, the concentration of PCBs found in fish tissues is expected to be considerably higher that the average concentration of PCBs in the water from which the fish were taken.

Acute toxic effects in the environment include death of animals, birds, or fish, and death or low growth rate in plants. Chronic effects from PCBs may include shortened lifespan, reproductive problems, lower fertility, and changes in appearance or behavior. The primary concern of PCBs in surface water is the chronic effect of bioaccumulation.

During the mid-1960s, some environmental scientists began seeing an increase of PCBs in animal tissues. In 1978, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned the use of PCBs in all but closed systems of manufacturing. In 1979, the use of PCBs was banned in all applications.

What are the health impacts of exposure to PCBs?

PCBs are extremely toxic. Low levels of PCBs have been shown to cause health problems in humans. Two parts per million (ppm) of PCBs is the highest acceptable concentration level in fish. The airborne limit of permissible exposure is 1 mg/m^3 (42% Chlorine) and 0.5 mg/m^3 (54% Chlorine) over eight hours of exposure. PCBs can affect humans through inhalation (respiration), digestion, or through the skin (dermal absorption).

In acute exposure, vapor can irritate the eyes, nose, and throat and cause an acne-like rash called chloracne. High exposure can damage the liver and may damage the nervous system causing numbness, weakness, and tingling in arms and legs. Chronic exposure may result in reproductive system problems; PCBs are animal teratogens. PCBs can be passed to a child through its mother's milk. PCBs can sometimes affect the immune system.

Individuals can be exposed to PCBs through a variety of means. Old appliances such as TVs and refrigerators may leak small amounts of PCBs when hot, as can old fluorescent lighting fixtures. Eating food containing PCBs is a means of exposure. Breathing air near contaminated sites and drinking PCB contaminated well water are two additional means of exposure. People who work with equipment containing PCBs are potentially exposed, and OSHA and NIOSH have set limits and procedures for those working in these situations.

What can be done about PCBs?

All people in industrial countries have some PCBs in their bodies. There are tests to fund out if the individual was exposed to higher than normal levels of PCBs. These tests can look for PCBs in blood, body fat, and breast milk. There is no predictive test to indicate if an individual will experience harmful health effects from exposure. Like many chemicals, the impacts of PCBs on individuals are widely varied and relate to many factors such as genetic predispositions, diet, general health, age, type and frequency of exposure, etc.

There are ways of destroying PCBs in both water and soil, effectively removing them from the environment. For soil, there are two tests for PCBs:

1. Rapid analysis of soil for presence of PCBs, which employs an atmosphere pressure ionization mass spectrophotometer. The rapid analysis uses soil samples heated in a flowing stream of pure nitrogen in which vaporized materials are trapped. A detection limit of 1 microgram can be achieved.

2. The immunoassay uses standards with known concentrations of PCBs to compare (assay) alongside samples of suspected soil.

PCBs can be destroyed by burning at 2400 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, many items containing PCBs can be destroyed appropriately and safely in hazardous waste incinerators that use burners at appropriate levels of heat. Two different technologies are being used for on-site destruction of PCBs. The first is the use of plasma arc torches, which burn up to 10,000 degrees F. This is used for many soils that are contaminated with large amounts of PCBs. The second process is a bacterial process or bioremediation that is used for rivers where large sediment concentrations of PCBs are found. Presently there are more than 20 strains of bacteria capable of using biphenyl as their sole source of carbon.

PCBs were a valuable family of chemicals for manufacturing throughout much of this century. Looking back, it is possible to identify problems caused by PCBs and consider what might have been done differently. The reality is that society benefitted from the use of these chemicals, and we now must deal with the negative legacy of these chemicals in the environment.

Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Ag. Adm. and Director, OSU Extension.

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