

# Controversy surrounds 2,4,5-T herbicide

By STEPHEN KINNEY

Controversy concerning protection of workers coming in contact with the herbicide 2,4,5, T plagued J.D. Irving Ltd., Woodlands Division last week. The chemical is a defoliant used to discourage hardwood undergrowth at reforestation sites. The Irving company is the largest user of 2,4,5, T in New Brunswick.

A letter to the editor printed on Sept. 15 in a New Brunswick daily newspaper contained allegations of unsafe working conditions which exposed students planting trees to the chemical. Officials from the province's Environment Department also told the Bugle that a Fredericton area student had reported inadequate use of protective gear by workers acting as flagmen for plans spraying the defoliant at the Irving operation. Both complainants referred to the company tree nursery in Deersdale near Juniper.

## RECENTLY SPRAYED

In a letter to the Telegraph Journal Joe McSheffrey, a Bath student employed by Irving this summer claimed that his tree planting crew had been asked to plant on fields recently sprayed. When seven members of his crew refused on the grounds that the chemical containing dioxin had been linked to cancer and genetic mutations they were fired according to McSheffrey.

Responding to the public complaint Deputy Minister of the Environment, Brian Barnes said that according to information supplied by the Department of Health, it was his understanding that "the chemical breaks down two to three days after spraying." The ground planted by Mr. McSheffrey's crew on Aug. 27 had been covered with the defoliant about 14 days earlier.

Irving spokesman David Oxley expanded on this theory claiming that this study of numerous foreign journals indicated that the substance broke down in two or three hours after being sprayed under sunny conditions. He claimed that the substance also broke down readily in moisture.

Dr. David Coombs, a biologist at the University of New Brunswick disagrees.

He says 2,4,5, T itself may breakdown but that does not necessarily mean the dioxin itself disappears. He points out that an important scientific factor is "persistence" and that dioxin, being

"hydrophobic" seeks out oily or fatty substances such as animal fat to continue its subsistence.

Although Mr. Oxley the Irving spokesman contends that very large concentrations are needed to be toxic, Dr. Coombs calls dioxin "the most toxic chemical known to mankind. You couldn't tie me down to a field that was being sprayed."

According to Dr. Coombs "Incredibly minor portions are all it takes to cause miscarriage."

The other complaint registered with the Environment Dept. stated that workers at the Deersdale site had not been adequately protected during the summer spraying. Employees at the Irving nursery were used as markers in the field for spray planes. Although respirators are provided for flagmen the complainant indicated that they were not always used due to insufficient instruction from supervisors.

Mr. Oxley said that the Irving company equipped workers serving as flagman with rainsuits, hardhats, gloves and respirators. "On protective equipment," he said, "we insist they use them." He says that company policy has a man in charge of the project morning and evening to "inform them (the flagmen) and to assure himself that they are adequately clothed."

Claiming that available manpower was spread thin already at the time, the province's Environmental Services Dept. had no inspectors on the scene during the spray period at the Deersdale reforestation site.

Cathy McLaggan, an engineering technician with the department, spent 21 days at the Irving's Boston Brook operation. There, she said "I know that some people were not using their gear. I understand in some cases they weren't fully informed or didn't feel they were informed. We are not pleased about them using flagmen at all," she continued. "It's something we are looking into."

Mr. Oxley conceded that it is not necessary to have people in the field. He stated that "we are trying in future to use permanent markers. We are concerned about the issue," he continued. "We are not going to take chances with employee's health."

Greg Shanks, also a technician with N.B.'s Environment Dept. said "I'm shocked if the supervisors were as laxadiscal about this

thing as has been claimed. You must wear a respirator at all times - you are dealing with a pesticide and they simply must be treated with respect."

The defoliant has been suspended in the United States, The Netherlands, Italy, Sweden and British Columbia and Ontario.

The US government banned the

use of agent orange, a composite of 2,4,5, T and 2,4, D in the Vietnam war when a 1969 report linked it to cancer, birth deformities and miscarriage.

New Brunswick officials are taking comfort in an Ontario Minister's statement that the chemical was banned solely because of public pressure, not for scientific

reasons.

Although controversy in Nova Scotia over the widely used 2,4, D has been longstanding, it is only recently that widespread public concern has been aroused in New Brunswick where massive amounts of 2,4,5, T have been dumped.

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## More on 2, 4, 5-T

By HAROLD DOHERTY  
Brunswickan Staff

Controversy has flared, as Steve Kinney has pointed out, over the use of the herbicide 2,4,5,T by J.D. Irving Ltd., Woodlands Division. The Controversy centres around two issues. One is whether or not adequate measures have been taken to protect workers exposed to this and other spray products. The other issue concerns whether we should even be using the product in New Brunswick.

In the article "Controversy Flares", Steven Kinney reported the experiences of workers who had been used as markers in the field for spray planes. E. Philip Furge, a student at UNB Fredericton says that he and his co-workers were sprayed six times on the 5th and 6th of June 1980. On two of these occasions the sprayings were directly overhead.

The J. D. Irving Ltd. Woodlands Division practices have been questionable with regard to the use of the highly controversial herbicide 2,4,5,T. In a letter to the Telegraph Journal of September 5, 1980, Joe McSheffey, a student at St. Thomas University complained of working in fields, of standing

alders and brush, that had just recently sprayed with the 2,4,5,T.

Campbell Morrison, was a foreman of a tree planting crew for Irving during the month of August, 1980. When first asked to transfer to the herbicide spraying operation Morrison refused. After some pressure had been exerted he agreed to work at the herbicide operation. One of the herbicides he used contained the 2,4,5,T. Morrison admits that full protective gear, as required by the N.B. Ministry of the Environment, was issued. However, he was not immediately told that he was using the product which was the main component in the defoliant Agent Orange. He was not told he was using a product that had been banned in the United States and three Canadian Provinces.

A spokesman for J.D. Irving Ltd., Woodlands Division quoted a report by a group of international scientists which concluded that the herbicide 2,4,5,T does not cause cancer, induce genetic mutations or birth defects. There is, however, conflicting evidence on the matter. The Environmental Protection Agency of the U.S. government placed a ban on the use of

the product in any form. The ban was based on a study initiated by the E.P.A. in Aalsea, Oregon.

E.P.A. Deputy Administrator Barbara Blum issued a statement March 1, 1979 concerning these studies. "Studies completed only days ago show a high miscarriage rate immediately following the spraying of 2,4,5,T in the forest around Aalsea, Oregon. The miscarriage rate was significantly higher than that in a control area in eastern Oregon where no 2,4,5,T is typically sprayed." "It's a remarkable correlation", said Blum. "While it is not proof of a cause and effect relationship, it is highly suggestive, particularly in light of animal data and gives great cause for concern."

What it amounts to is that the governments of the United States and three Canadian provinces have decided to play it safe. If they are wrong they will be wrong on the side of human safety and environmental concern. If the N.B. Ministry of the Environment is wrong someone will have to pay the consequences. That someone will not be J.D. Irving Ltd. It will be the workers employed by that company.

## ATTENTION: Graduating Students

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Regardless of whether you intend to pursue graduate studies at UNB or elsewhere, you should be aware of the various scholarships which are available to students entering a Graduate School. You can obtain information about such scholarships from the UNB School of Graduate Studies and Research. You can also obtain copies of the Graduate Calendar and other information relating to graduate studies from the School.

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