

Adjournment Debate

leaked documents which have come to our attention about the presence of dioxin in very small quantities in ordinary paper products. These documents come from the United States. Very small quantities of dioxins have been found in paper products there.

It so happens that the processes in Canada for manufacturing pulp and paper are the same as in the United States. Therefore, we have reason to believe that if dioxins result from the use of chlorine in the production process in the United States our own ordinary paper products such as disposable diapers, coffee filters, bathroom tissue and writing paper must also contain dioxin.

I do not want to be alarmist about this. It is possible that the contamination of this part of our environment by dioxin may be the least of our problems. We know that there are dioxins in other parts of the system. We know they are in the Great Lakes and have been found as a result of other processes on the West Coast. We know that the eggs in herring colonies do not hatch and that very minute quantities of the most deadly dioxins have been found there. While I am raising this particular question regarding dioxins, I do not want to exaggerate it. It is a global problem and there are, of course, cumulative effects from exposure to dioxins. Very, very small quantities can be deadly. We have to be extremely careful about this matter.

• (1835)

We have no reason to believe that there is any safe exposure level in the case of the deadliest of the dioxins. While I do not want to be alarmist about it, I think given the seriousness of the problem this was a reasonable question to ask. In this particular case we are not talking about the general environmental question, the question about drinking water and waste products in the water system, but about paper products, a product which would come under the auspices of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

I asked this question of the Minister and the response I received was quite unsatisfactory. It was to the effect that he could not act, that the law did not allow him to act. Indeed, he suggested that somehow I wanted him to disobey the law and that the New Democratic Party was not interested in obeying the law.

If one looks very carefully at the legislation, one will see that it clearly shows that he can act. He can order inquiries. He is responsible for hazardous products. If there is dioxin in paper products, then the products themselves become hazardous products. He can act. So also can the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp).

We have reason to believe that the Minister of National Health and Welfare now has some kind of inquiry going, yet we do not have any details with respect to it. I hope he will provide some details as to what sort of a study is being conducted and when we might have some results. If the results do confirm that there is a danger, what kind of protection will

the public be getting? One way or another, we ought to be getting some action on this. So far we have simply got escapism from the Minister who does not want to take his responsibilities seriously.

I think there is a moral in this story. I think it goes to show that we need more serious environmental protection, and we need it in a comprehensive way. Paper products are only part of the problem. If dioxins are present in the process, then they will show up in the products. But if dioxins are present in the process, then they will also be in the effluent. They will get into the drinking water and into the fish and the wildlife.

We need to be dealing with all of these problems, not just the products' one. That is why we need a stronger Ministry of the Environment. That is why we need environmental protection legislation. That is why we need active co-operation among the different Ministers for their particular responsibilities: the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, in the case of actual consumer products.

I am sorry to see that we have not so far had this kind of action. The environmental protection Bill before the House at present is a very, very weak rendition of environmental protection. We do not have it there. What we need is a much more global approach to what is clearly a global problem.

Mr. Claude Lanthier (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works): Investigations by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the American Paper Institute have revealed the presence of low levels of dioxin in effluents from some bleach and kraft mills and in certain paper products. Press releases have been issued on these findings by both organizations.

Dioxin was present in low concentration for some products but not in others. For example, it was present at a concentration of 13 parts per trillion in writing paper, four parts per trillion in paper towels, and six to eight parts per trillion in paper plates. Its presence was not detected at all in baby diapers.

Dioxin has also been shown to be present in the effluent and pulp produced by some bleached kraft pulp mills but not in others. Average concentrations of 0.16 parts per trillion were measured in the untreated effluents, 0.04—that is 400 parts per trillion, which is very small incidentally—in the treated effluent, and 13 parts per trillion in the finished pulp.

The federal Government is concerned about the presence of dioxin in these materials, however small they are, as we regard dioxin as a particularly toxic chemical and believe that every attempt should be made to reduce its entry into the environment. I would emphasize that the concentrations measured are extremely low. Nevertheless, the risks they pose need to be properly assessed.