

Pesticides

the precautions necessary to protect the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals, including pesticides.

The Department intends to extend and expand its environmental research and monitoring program for pesticides until it forms, in co-operation with other federal Departments and provincial authorities, a truly national, co-ordinated program.

Mr. A. H. Harry Brightwell (Perth): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to participate in the debate. Certainly the Hon. Member's motion captures my interest. I have great respect for his past experiences and knowledge in the environmental area. I am in favour of supporting his endeavours, although I have some question about his particular motion today.

I am sure the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) knows that the main value of the motion before us today is that it will stir up interest in this area. I am sure he is succeeding in that particular regard. The problem which he addresses is a massive one. Every Hon. Member is concerned about human health and the status of the environment. We are very eager to see something positive happen.

Perhaps it would take a task force study to establish what should be studied in this regard. The Hon. Member wants us to study the use of pesticides. It would be very important to study herbicides and other chemicals used in the agricultural field as well. What about the vast array of other chemicals, such as the ones used to ripen fruit and the ones used to prevent fruit from ripening? Chemicals are used in many different areas. Why should they not be included in such a study? The task would be a monumental one.

Can we afford to put all our efforts, time and money into a task force which would require years to produce a report? In that period of time each agency involved in pesticides and herbicides would probably say: "We will wait for the report of the task force to come down and then take action". It is possible that a task force could end up delaying the procedure.

Of course we cannot think of agriculture without thinking of the use of chemicals. At least that is my impression based upon what I have seen in my riding of Perth. Their use is essential for the prosperity of the area. In fact, they are essential for people in the area of the Hon. Member for Scarborough Centre (Mrs. Browes) who spoke so eloquently just a few minutes ago. She represents consumers, as do I, who wish to eat inexpensive Canadian food. Thus farmers will have to use some chemicals.

If we set up a task force, would it concern itself with only the effects of chemicals upon the environment and human health? Certainly it would have to look at other issues. What about alternative methods which do not involve pesticides or herbicides? What can be done to help the situation in that regard?

My area of the country is a high corn growing region where the product Atrazine is used to dedicate the land for use in corn year after year. In fact, it allows the land to be used in

that way. However, what is the spin-off effect of that chemical? I do not believe that this chemical presents a health hazard. Perhaps this raises another topic. How many chemicals are being used about which we do not know? As I said, the land in my area is dedicated to corn use year after year. The land gets packed. Farmers are required to use larger tractors to break the land and to plant their corn. The situation becomes less efficient as time goes on. At present the tendency in farming areas is to recognize that we cannot continue with this farming method and that we must look for a rotation method which allows the texture of the soil to improve. If we want to keep our topsoil—it is shrinking—we must look at different farming methods.

Would the task force study such alternative methods so that it would not be necessary to use chemicals? I would suggest that the task force would study that topic as well as a number of other ones.

In the centre of this debate is the tendency to sensationalize. We recognize that risks have to be taken in life and that many of the hazards are blown out of proportion by people who choose to do so for their own reasons. Perhaps they wish to sell newspapers. Other people might do it for political reasons, just to be on the other side of the debate or perhaps to garner votes from the people who are concerned about the issue. Some people feed upon the concern of others in terms of the use of chemicals in forestry or agriculture.

Returning to the farmers in my area, they were really sad when they lost the chemical Alachlor last year. It was an important chemical to them. However, they had alternatives; and they did not have to use Alachlor. Perhaps the greatest problem was that it took competition out of the field. It took a major chemical, which was shown to work and was working, out of the fields. Farmers in my area are also responsible people. They do not want to be part of a process where well water or other drinking water in Ontario might be contaminated. As a result, they took the responsible action and agreed that it should not be used. They still suffer from the loss. They would like to see more study of the situation to see whether the product can be used. If it is found to be safe and that it does not contaminate water—and I know that the evidence available at the present time is limited—Canadian farmers would use the chemical in a very responsible manner.

I have experienced chemical use on farms and the pressures faced by farmers. The only control they have over avoiding poisoning themselves is to mix their products standing with their backs to the wind, so that any fumes from the product are wafted away and they are not exposed to them. Perhaps these chemicals are more dangerous to users. Of course we worry about the end result, the contamination of the environment, the contamination of food product, and the contamination of water. However, very often there is more danger to the person applying the chemical product than there is to any end user.