

Adjournment Debate

contamination. She found that most of the toxic chemicals are in vegetables, milk, eggs and meat, with only a very small part in fruit. On the other hand, she found that dioxin, which is one of the most deadly of all man-made chemicals, was found mainly in fresh fruit.

Traces of the deadliest variety of dioxin were found in milk and leafy vegetables. The level of toxic chemicals found in those foods was 80 times higher than the Ontario guidelines say is safe for consumption. She found there were more toxic chemicals in food than there were actually in water. She found, as far as human exposure to toxic chemicals from these sources was concerned, something in the order of 86 per cent was from food, 11 per cent from water and 3.5 per cent from the air we breathe.

The study is alarming. It is actually frightening when one thinks that every day of every week of every month each of us are consuming fresh fruit and vegetables from our countryside which contain these high levels of toxic chemicals. One environmental commentator indicated that perhaps an apple a day, which we used to think would keep the doctor away, may very well see us end up in a cancer ward.

The study pointed out that Ontario fruit and vegetables are no different from fruit and vegetables anywhere in the world. In fact, if we suddenly went off the consumption of Ontario fruit and vegetables and started eating imported fruit and vegetables, we would be exposing ourselves to the same toxic chemicals and perhaps worse. It was suggested, for example, that by eating pears imported from Mexico we would be exposing ourselves to DDT, which is legal there.

What all of this seems to show is that no matter what we do in the way of banning toxic chemicals, no matter what we do to try and prevent their impact on us, there is a form of international pollution; that we have a great circulation of air carrying these pollutants with a fall out that lands right on top of us here in Canada.

• (2205)

I think this was probably brought home to us most dramatically by the recent events in Chernobyl in the Soviet Union. There we saw the nuclear power plant disaster having an impact, not only in the Soviet Union itself, but in eastern Europe, northern Europe, western Europe and, to some extent, even in North America.

It is becoming clear that there is a circulation of air masses causing a fall out which can occur anywhere in the world. This is going to have an impact on what we eat and the toxic chemicals in our food chain. What is it that we can do about this? I hope tonight perhaps we will have some answers from the Parliamentary Secretary. It seems to me there are at least two things we should be doing ourselves. First, we should be carrying on a much more sophisticated and careful monitoring process to make sure that we know what is going into the foods that we are consuming.

The Department of National Health and Welfare and the Department of the Environment do a certain amount of this now. It seems to me that with these new findings from the Davies report we should be doing more and more of this type of research.

The second thing, of course, is to have finally enacted in this country some environmental control legislation. That has been promised by the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan). It was promised some time ago but we have yet to see it. I hope tonight the Parliamentary Secretary will tell us exactly when we are going to have that legislation introduced to Parliament.

Mr. Bill Domm (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Canada Post): Mr. Speaker, the Member for York East (Mr. Redway) has shown a continuing interest since becoming a Member of Parliament in matters concerning the environment. I am pleased to be able to respond to his concerns, which have been brought about because of a report which was released the week ending May 17, which revealed very low levels of various chemical substances, including dioxins, in foods collected in the Great Lakes area.

This report relates to a study conducted by Doctor Kate Davies of the Toronto Department of Public Health. Doctor Davies reported her findings on May 19, 1986, at the World Large Lakes Conference held at Mackinac Island in Michigan. Thus, there may well be questions of concern by the public as to whether or not dioxin contamination of the food supply is increasing, and if food represents a hazard to public health.

At the outset, it is extremely important to emphasize that Doctor Davies' study and other studies, including those conducted by the Health Protection Branch of the Department of National Health and Welfare, do not imply any imminent hazard to health.

A draft of the recent Davies report has been examined by officials in the light of existing data from branch food monitoring programs. Staff have been unable to confirm the high levels of dioxins and furans reportedly found in fresh fruit and vegetables.

The Health Protection Branch has been monitoring the food supply across Canada for over 10 years, and it has been doing this to detect the presence of pesticides and related compounds such as PCBs, dioxins and furans. Our data indicates that the levels of these substances in the Canadian food supply are no different than those reported in other parts of the world. In addition, results of monitoring food at the retail level in Ontario do not differ from those in any other region in the country.

Thus, consumers should continue to eat fresh fruit and vegetables and other foods without fear. Indeed, the hazards associated with avoiding such nutritious foods are potentially far greater than any risks resulting from exposure to low levels of these chemical contaminants.