

*Private Members' Business*

The Ontario government released a study last September that concluded that dioxins and furans, two families of toxic substances, can be found in low levels in many foods, including meat, poultry, wheat, eggs, fruits, vegetables and milk.

Now I would like to speak more about the pesticides. Federal government officials estimate that between 250 and 300 pesticides are in use. Pesticides are sprayed on fruits and vegetables and kill parasites, fungi and weeds. They help to ripen produce, improve its colouring and protect it from bruising.

Agriculture Canada states that about half of fruits and vegetables have residues below the tolerance level, and most meat products also contain minute traces of pesticides. But Diane Kirkpatrick, Director of Health and Welfare Canada's Bureau of Chemical Safety, says that while the government should remain vigilant in monitoring levels, unless that is done, consumers may not be safe because residues are below the stated limit. So there is a need for continuing research. There is a need for research into the cumulative effects of additives and food pesticides.

She also said that the government is not worried about minute levels of Alar on apples and that there is no concrete evidence from animal studies as yet that Alar is carcinogenic. But there is a principle in law: "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence". We would not like to wait for the harm to happen. When we have demonstrated the harm, even in animal studies, we have to accept that and presume the safety of the individual is foremost in our minds.

The NRDC study states that Alar is a potent carcinogen. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, while it believes that NRDC's analysis is exaggerated, has, nevertheless, announced it is accelerating its proposal to ban Alar. So there was concern. Yet, Health and Welfare Canada has given the chemical a clean bill of health. So again there is a need for awareness on the part of the Canadian public.

The key difference between the U.S. and Canadian responses is how the governments interpret cancer risks from chemicals. Virtually all the information about the safety of chemicals comes from tests on rats and mice in the laboratory. In the case of daminozide and the chemical known as UDMH—the daminozide breaks down into a compound called UDMH when processed into apple sauce and apple juice—the laboratory studies

to date are somewhat ambiguous. After the first year of a two-year study UDMH caused cancer in animals only at the highest dose tested. Canadian officials have interpreted this information to mean that UDMH is only carcinogenic when consumed in very large quantities.

By contrast, U.S. officials believe that, despite the uncertainties, there is a good chance that UDMH increases the risk of cancer even when consumed in much smaller doses.

I think the message here is, at a given point in time a particular dose of consumption may not be harmful. When taken over a period of time, cumulatively, it could harm the citizen.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the levels of UDMH found in apple products present a lifetime cancer risk of about one in 22,000. Now, if you look at the risk of diseases in medical practice, certainly we worry even when the risk of illness is one in 22,000. We try to discover a cure. We try to discover a treatment. So if we do that in the day-to-day practice of medicine, then certainly we should also be concerned about risk of cancer even if the studies are not quite definitive yet.

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Although this is a minute risk for each individual, when averaged over an entire population, however, it appears much more significant.

The Environmental Protection Agency's analysis is correct. UDMH could cause about 1,000 additional cancers in a nation the size of Canada. That is alarming. The key question is what to assume for the purposes of a regulatory policy. This is where Canada's approach is disturbing. The U.S. assumptions are the most protective of health, while Canada's are much less so. If Canada is wrong there will be continued exposure to a cancer-causing chemical and an increase in deaths due to cancer.

The University of Western Ontario Geneticist, Dr. Joseph Cummins worries that a pesticide like Alar might cause rare blood vessel cancers and thus there will be a measurable increase in that kind of cancer in the future.

Linda Pim, a Toronto environmental biologist, has similar concerns about the long-term impact of pesticides. Although individual chemicals might be safe on their own, they might be dangerous in combination with others. Again, this is one aspect of harm that research as proposed by this motion could show the Canadian public and our Canadian health officials. I would say that the