

# The Politics of Chemicals

BY DAVID G. CASSIDY

Editor, *Turf Magazine*

**I**f anyone had any doubts before, it should now be obvious that with the recent restrictions announced on chlorpyrifos products (known to most people by the most common trade names Dursban and Lorsban), the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) is more about politics than science — more about elections than facts — more about what is expedient than what is right.

I have the EPA's press release announcing the restrictions on chlorpyrifos on my desk, and the headline alone makes me want to vomit. The headline reads, "Clinton-Gore Administration Acts to Eliminate Major Uses of the Pesticide Dursban to Protect Children and Public Health."

I've written before on how despicable it is for us to allow our politicians to use our children as pawns in their political agendas, so I'll leave that part alone. The first three words of this headline tell us all we need to know about what's going on here: "Clinton-Gore Administration . . ."

Why do you think Mr. Gore's name has all of a sudden become part of the story? The answer is the same as that to the question, "Why do you think the EPA decided to use the FQPA to go after the single most used and well known insecticide in the world?"

Haven't got the answer yet?

Well, the same answer could be used to answer the questions, "Why did the EPA ignore the testimony of over 200 individuals, each attesting to the benefits and safety of Dursban? Why was 35 years of safe use ignored, while an old study

about neurological effects in rodents held up as proof of the need for these restrictions?"

Still need the answer? Here it is: The presidential elections. This action and its timing is all about Mr. Gore solidifying his support in the environmental community. More importantly for Mr. Gore, having the EPA attack such a well known chemical (notice the use of the trade name in the headline, as opposed to the more correct use of the chemical name, which would not have made such a big splash) helps to get him support in the less-reactionary-yet-environmentally-concerned suburban homeowners.

Here are a few of the other gems you can find in the EPA press release: "Today's action will also significantly reduce residues of chlorpyrifos on several foods regularly eaten by children."

What residues? Do we have a "residue" problem? (the answer is "no, we don't"). Also, where is the study that shows which foods are "regularly eaten by children?"

EPA administrator Carol M. Browner is quoted as saying, "Now that we have completed the most extensive scientific evaluation ever conducted on the poten-

tial health hazards of a pesticide . . ." What "evaluation?" I've been looking for four weeks and can't find evidence of any studies conducted on Dursban by the EPA for the FQPA. I ask Administrator Browner, were these supposed studies more "extensive" than the evidence offered by 35 years of safe and effective use in this and over 80 other countries?

Here's another: "Exposure to these kinds of pesticides can cause neurological effects." Notice the careful wording. It doesn't say "neurological harm" or "damage." What the heck is a "neurological effect?"

I would also like to remind the EPA and the Clinton-Gore Administration that we are talking about a pesticide here, not a food supplement. It is *supposed* to kill things. When used correctly, it kills things that can cause disease and death. Yes, even sickness and death in children.

Since you won't find them in any of the EPA materials I've seen, here are a few facts about Dursban and the new rules that I have come across:

- One of the most widely used homeowner applied pesticides in the world, will no longer be available for homeowner use in the USA after existing stocks have been depleted.

- This action is not based on any new study or new information. Dursban has been around for over 30 years and is the most tested pesticide on the market. Nothing new has been added to what we already know about this substance.

- There is not one case — not one — of any person, child or adult, being harmed by the proper use of Dursban. (In a *Seattle Times* article following the EPA announcement, William O. Robertson — for 30 years the director of a Poison Control Center — offered that he could not recall a single incident of a Dursban-caused illness).

- There are thousands of people who rely on this product to safely and effectively protect themselves and their families from such pests as fire ants, cockroaches, stinging insects, fleas, spiders and ticks, not to mention the protection from termites. (In the same *Seattle Times* article, Mr. Robertson says that they see very few incidents of pesticide exposures



of any kind, but they do see numerous cases of insect bites and bee stings. He estimates that for every call they receive about pesticide exposure, they receive 100 about insect bites.)

- Over 200 individuals testified in EPA hearings on the benefits of Dursban; everyone from lawn care operators to homeowners and even a kid who was bitten by a brown recluse spider.

- All studies (over 3600 to date) show that Dursban does not travel to ground water, and that it breaks down on site (through microorganisms and UV radiation). After it dries, tests repeatedly show it does not transfer.

- Dursban has never been shown to be carcinogenic to humans.

- The much reported info that Dursban has been shown to cause neuro-problems in rats is not new information. Forget the fact that there is much evidence that the rat study does not transfer to humans. To replicate the dosage given to the rats in that study, you would have

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to do an indoor application of Dursban over an entire home every three minutes over 500 times in a row. If you did that with Cheez Whiz it would probably kill you.

So, the facts are that there is no new information about Dursban. No one has been harmed by it. It is not harmful to the environment. And yet, we can thank "Clinton-Gore" for protecting our "chil-

dren." I hope we can all remember to blame "Clinton-Gore" for the pain and suffering experienced next year by all the people (including the "children") who will be bitten by brown recluse spiders, stinging wasps and lyme ticks.

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