

Plant Protectants ARE Safer Than You Think

by John Lebedevs

Ever since the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the American public has had alarming concerns about the risk of agricultural chemicals. Much of the concern is due to media coverage. Coverage tends to overstate the negative (bad news always gets more attention than good news). Results from preliminary findings may be featured while follow-



up studies with positive or neutral findings receive little or no exposure. The public also has a real problem understanding the nature of risk. Putting into perspective the personal risks we all take everyday in our daily activities, the lesser risks we face from natural disasters and the much lower risks we face from possible chemical exposure. In other words, the actual risks from chemical exposure is much lower than the perceived risk, while the risk from such activities as driving a car is much greater than recognized by the public. The E.P.A. has established standards (more commonly known as tolerances) to help make sure that any pesticide residues do not exceed safe levels.

The E.P.A. procedure for determining chemical tolerance on a given crop/plant begins with an evaluation of the potential health risks arising from residues of the pesticide in question. To identify the most severe potential health hazards associated with such residues, laboratory animals are fed varying doses of the chemical over their lifetime. The highest dose at which the animal exhibits no adverse health effects is identified. A 150 pound adult would have to eat **3000** heads of lettuce **per day** for a **lifetime** to ingest the amount of commonly used pesticide found to cause health problems in laboratory animals. Many of the plant protectants used on our crops are the same or similar that are used on our golf courses to keep the turf in a healthy condition.

Before a pesticide can be registered for use, it must undergo at least 120 separate tests. It takes 8-10 years and \$35 to \$50 million to develop and register a pesticide product. On the average, only one in 20,000 chemicals makes it from the laboratory to the field. As you can see the plant protectants that we use have gone over a rigorous testing process and only the ones that pass the E.P.A. registration process make it to the marketplace.

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