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THE 2,4-D CONTROVERSY — 1981

The use of the herbicide 2,4-D has once again come under attack in several areas of Wisconsin. In October 1980 the City of Madison put a temporary moratorium on the use of 2,4-D by all parks and public works personnel. The reason for the moratorium was in August 1980 a child of a family that lived across the street from a park that had just been sprayed with 2,4-D had a mild epileptic seizure. The family blamed the city spraying of the park as the cause even though the child was indoors at the time of the spraying. The child has a history of seizures and did not play in the park after it was sprayed. The mere odor of the spray supposedly provoked the attack. The parents of the child were active

in local Vietnam Veterans organization that is trying to ban all phenoxy herbicides. This incident, with no medical proof, was brought before the Madison Health Department where a very vocal Vietnam Vets group pushed this committee into recommending a halt to all herbicide spraying. The city mayor in September instituted the temporary ban on the use of 2,4-D by all city departments.

In the meantime, in December environmentalists tried unsuccessfully to get a ban on the use of 2,4-D by all Dane County parks and highway personnel. part of the basis for the county ban proposal was the incident in the city of Madison. The environmentalists relied heavily on the unsubstantiated city ban on 2,4-D use. This county wide attempt at a ban got no further than the county Agricultural zoning committee where the issue was tabled indefinitely. This committee saw the weakness in the whole issue. Speakers for the ban were three local activists while speaking against the ban were University of Wisconsin extension specialists, three golf course superintendents, six industry representatives and five farmers. The U.W. personnel so completely refuted any arguments against 2,4-D that the Ag Zoning Committee decision was unanimous.

The 2,4-D ban then went back to the city parks board and the city committee on the environment. Here again the U.W. extension people, golf course superintendents and agri-business interests soundly defeated the further efforts to ban 2,4-D.



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In late January 1981 the Madison Common Council brought the whole matter up for a formal council vote to permanently ban 2,4-D. The Vietnam Vets were heavily represented as were the U.W. and agri-business people. After considerable debate the city decided to severely limit the use of 2,4-D in city parks. Golf courses, cemeteries, athletic fields were exempt but 2,4-D use was banned in all general parks areas. Vietnam Vet groups were angry over the ruling and vowed to bring the issue up for another vote.

In December 1980 the Janesville City Council had a similar motion to ban 2,4-D brought forth. This motion stemmed from one council member who had heard about the incident in Madison in August 1980. For lack of any more substantial evidence the Janesville Council tabled the ban permanently without a formal vote.

The environmental groups are searching for any shred of evidence to support their efforts against 2,4-D. They feel that 2,4-5-T and 2,4-D are chemicals cousins and therefore should be banned equally. The potential problems with the issue of 2,4-5-T have been brought out in substantial medical tests and consequently the products use has been curtailed. But 2,4-D has yet to be medically or environmentally proven a hazard. The EPA is looking into the product but at this time sees no evidence of any harm to the public. The herbicide 2,4-D has 35 years of relatively safe use. Until conclusive medical tests show a health hazard exists the product will remain on the market if some uninformed city or county agency does not act hastily.

It has been suspected that these environmental groups will be making another try in the state legislature this year to ban 2,4-D. However as of March 15, 1981 no such bill has emerged. The WGCSA board has appointed an environmental committee composed of Randy Smith, Monroe Miller, and Tom Harrison to follow up on this issue and keep the membership informed.

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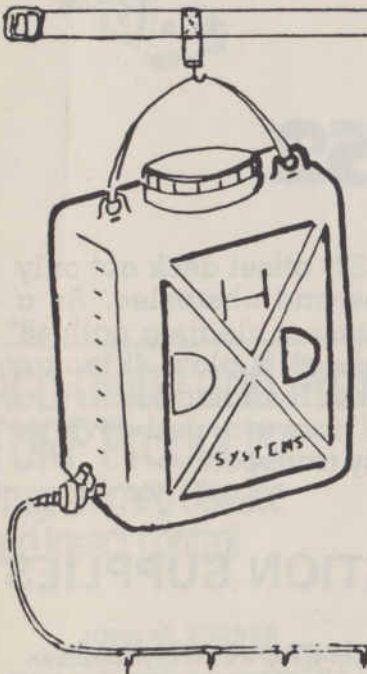
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