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U.S. Plant Patent 2887

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Editorial

The DDT Finale

Seven months of exhaustive surgery consisting of exploratory probes, hearings, 8,900 pages of documented testimony and the consultation of the country's most eminently qualified practitioners has elicited from chief surgeon Edmund M. Sweeney the opinion that the patient, DDT, should live a normal healthy life.

Mr. Sweeney, in his report issued on April 25 by EPA, said that he could find nothing wrong with the patient. He said, "there seems to be little question of the far ranging public health and welfare benefits from DDT, historically." On the topic of human safety he is quoted: "Those that would ban all use of DDT because of the possibility of some damage to man, the evidence of which is said to consist of the results of a few experiments with animals, would do well to compare such skimpy evidence of risk with the well-documented proof of the benefits which DDT has bestowed on mankind."

The transcript of testimony of such witnesses as Dr. Jesse Steinfeld, Surgeon General of the U.S.; Dr. John Higginson, director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer; and the report of Mr. Sweeney form two-thirds of the evidence required by William D. Ruckelshaus, EPA Administrator, to make a final decision on DDT.

The remaining third took place in May. It consisted of oral and written arguments of lawyers representing the interested parties—EPA's Office of Pesticide, Environmental Defense Fund, industry petitioners and others, and the Public Health Service. All argument was held on exceptions to Mr. Sweeney's report.

At press time, an EPA spokesman said that the critical decision on whether the 320 products (DDT formulations) covering the 14 remaining uses should be retained or cancelled would be made by Mr. Ruckelshaus this month.

We must speculate that the fate of DDT has set a precedent for future hearings on chemical protectants. By association, DDT has become synonymous with all pesticides in the mind of the public. In putting DDT to the test, Americans also charted the future course of other chemicals, many far more toxic than DDT but having a shorter residual life.

We would hope that Mr. Sweeney's report, which cost many thousands of tax dollars to prepare, can now be used in a positive way to educate the uninformed on the scrutiny with which industry and Government test and register modern chemicals. It would be a waste to permit this document to rest in the back of a file drawer.