

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

SPECIALTY PESTICIDES: SOCIETY'S UNSUNG HEROES

You've read it in the newspapers. You've heard it on TV. The decade of the 1990s is the decade Americans are embracing traditional values. Tired of the race to overachieve, Americans are rediscovering the pleasures their immediate environments provide.

Many Americans don't give a second thought to a kitchen cupboard free from cockroaches, a front lawn minus weeds, a nearby pond teeming with fish. Such benefits — all part of a clean, healthy living environment — are taken for granted. They're as American as mom and apple pie.

Without the use of specialty pesticides, however, the story would be radically different. Disease-infested trees? Shade is scarce. Vegetation-choked waterways? Fish don't flourish. Roach-infested kitchens? Forget the food.

Specialty pesticides rid homes and workplaces of annoying and damaging insects, noxious weeds and plant diseases. They work selectively, like antibiotics work to rid the human body of only the undesirable bacteria and germs.

Properly used, specialty pesticides play a big role in helping this nation maintain one of the highest standards of living in the world. However, the road isn't always smooth. Specialty pesticides are under fire from several sectors, both public and private, but their value to society is proven.

While risks must be considered, the benefits of specialty pesticides can't be denied. Any medicine used properly and according to label instructions can do much good. Used improperly or abused, it becomes a poison. The dose makes the poison. The tests that specialty pesticides undergo

during the registration process are similar to those for pharmaceuticals. But, in most cases, specialty pesticides must undergo even more tests to prove they can interact with the environment, as well as humans, without undue risk.



Specialty pesticides help deliver a pest-free living environment for Americans.

Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop encourages the public to recognize the difference between real risk and hypothetical risk: "The risk, for example, of being killed by an automobile (1 in 6,000) is much greater than any hypothetical risk of a pesticide. Yet that doesn't keep us off the road, either as passengers or as pedestrians.

"By focusing on a hypothetical risk, like that from pesticides, not only do people find their anxiety levels elevated, but by focusing on a straw man, they also feel that they are doing something to improve their health. In so doing, they often neglect all the other things that they could be doing more readily, more legitimately, and with greater effect, such as paying attention to smoking, alcohol, exercise, balanced diet and so on."

The lesson is simple: Everything has risks, but risks must be weighed against benefits. Americans use potentially toxic products — from cleansers to gasoline — every day. Used properly, they serve their purpose and improve our quality of life. Specialty pesticides do, too.

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