

Canada Declares Triclosan Toxic

Beyond Pesticides talks on public radio about the new environmental classification

As reported in "Around the Country" on page 6, Canada completed its assessment of the antibacterial pesticide triclosan and concluded that triclosan is harmful to the environment. Public Radio International's (PRI) *Living on Earth* recently interviewed Beyond Pesticides' Nichelle Harriott about the toxic antibacterial agent triclosan. Hear the complete interview on Beyond Pesticides' website, www.beyondpesticides.org/antibacterial/triclosan.htm.

GELLERMAN (PRI): The chemical triclosan can be found in thousands of household products - toothpaste, kids' toys and face creams, computer keyboards, yoga mats and soaps - especially soaps. Triclosan is in so many products because it kills germs. Now the Canadian government has just declared the antibacterial agent an environmental toxin, and has proposed regulations that would sharply curtail its use in Canada.

HARRIOTT: Every product that triclosan is in, is essentially washed down the drain and directly goes into the environment. In surface water, it degrades to another chemical, 2,4-DCP, which is known under the *Clean Water Act* as a priority pollutant, which means that EPA is supposed to regulate that chemical...We don't actually know what the effects are because no one is looking at this, yet we put this chemical into the environment.

GELLERMAN: But Canada specifically says that there's not sufficient evidence to conclude that this is harmful to people.

HARRIOTT: That is pretty shocking...We know that triclosan is an endocrine disruptor, it impacts our hormones. So if this chemical is in the environment, this is a concern, because it may accumulate up the food chain, we may be ingesting this chemical unbeknownst to us, so what are we doing to our bodies? Triclosan has been found in urine, it has been found in breast milk, it has been found in umbilical cord blood.

GELLERMAN: There have been concerns about this antibiotic chemical that is that it could create resistance to drugs that we have to fight bacteria, what is the evidence that this is actually happening?

HARRIOTT: Well, there is some preliminary evidence that bacteria exposed to triclosan eventually become resistant to triclosan. And once resistant to triclosan, they may have cross-resistance to other

antibiotics, then there is a serious public health concern.

GELLERMAN: As I understand, when triclosan is combined with chlorine, which is in many water supplies, it forms chloroform!

HARRIOTT: Yes, there is one study that indicated that. And of course, that waves a lot of red flags. If you're brushing your teeth, and a lot of toothpaste contains triclosan, are you being exposed to chloroform through the chlorine in the tap water? Chloroform is very toxic, it's not something that you want to be inhaling. Our regulatory system tends to be more reactionary than precautionary, and so we allow chemicals into the environment without sufficient human and environmental health overview.

GELLERMAN: In the U.S., the EPA regulates triclosan as a pesticide; the FDA looks into its uses in foods and drugs. Shelly Burgess is a spokesperson with the FDA.

BURGESS (FDA): Triclosan is currently not known to be hazardous to humans. We are engaged in ongoing scientific and regulatory review of the safety of triclosan. What consumers should know is that we don't have sufficient safety evidence to recommend changing consumer use of products that contain triclosan at this time.

GELLERMAN: Does the FDA have any evidence to suggest that triclosan in antibacterial soaps provides a benefit?

BURGESS: What I can say is that we don't currently limit the concentration of triclosan in over-the-counter consumer products. And this is because FDA's view of the safety and effectiveness of triclosan is ongoing.

GELLERMAN: But I'm reading from a paper that was presented by the FDA to the public two years ago and it says: "At this time the Agency does not have evidence that triclosan in antibacterial soaps and body washes provides any benefits over washing with regular soap in water." That's from your agency! Then why is it being sold?

BURGESS: Well, again, we're engaged in ongoing scientific and regulatory review with the safety of triclosan. We're going to publish those findings in winter 2012.

