

Suskind Talks About Monsanto Study

Editor's Note: The herbicide 2,4,5-T was widely used for 30 years to control vegetation on farms and forest lands. It was in Agent Orange, which was heavily sprayed in Vietnam to deprive Communist troops of cover. It was in popular weed-killers. For 20 years — until 1969 — it was manufactured at the Monsanto plant in Nitro.

In recent years the product has been linked with a number of health problems. Investigations have revealed that the manufacture of the herbicide creates a poisonous byproduct, dioxin. This February, the Environmental Protection Agency banned most uses of 2,4,5-T pending further study.

Dr. Raymond R. Suskind of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine is currently conducting a study of Monsanto workers who were exposed to 2,4,5-T, particularly those workers who received heavy exposure to dioxin during a 1949 accident at the plant. He was interviewed about his study by reporters Richard Grimes, Steve Mullins and Robin Toner.

TONER: I guess the first question, Dr. Suskind, is what brings you to town?

DR. SUSKIND: Well, I think you already know what brings me to town, and that is to conduct a study of workers who were involved in an exposure to the 2,4,5-T process and its contaminants between the years 1948 and 1964 in a Monsanto Chemical Plant in Nitro, W. Va.

TONER: You're under contract with Monsanto, right?

DR. SUSKIND: We don't have a contract with Monsanto at the moment. We made an agreement and it was a gentleman's agreement. I have been interested and have been studying the original group that was affected back in 1949 and followed them until 1955. I had a continuing interest in problems of chlorinated hydrocarbon acne, as well as the effects of unchlorinated hydrocarbons on other organ systems. [We felt] it would be a good idea to go back and study that group that we are now studying.

TONER: The reason I ask this question is that as you know the steel workers [union] have invited Monsanto to come in and do a similar study. There have been some who have said that they would like with some suspicion on a study that is being paid for by Monsanto.

DR. SUSKIND: Well, I can't really comment on that because the study — whether it's done by myself or others who are expert in the field — it has to be paid by somebody. Now my department is largely funded — the department itself — in largely funded through federal research grants.

TONER: You mean at the University of Cincinnati?

DR. SUSKIND: At the University of Cincinnati. Eighty percent of our budget is from federal sources. This is largely from [the] National Institutes of Health, including the National Institute of Environmental Sciences, the National Cancer Institute, and others at the national institutes — there are any

MONSANTO STUDY — Dr. Raymond R. Suskind of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine responds to questions concerning a study of Monsanto workers who have been exposed to herbicide 2,4,5-T and heavy doses of the poisonous byproduct, dioxin.

experience we know that there was skin effects. These were more or less acute insofar as the skin was concerned. They had acne and they had atesses and they had lots of problems which were both cosmetic and somewhat disabling in the skin. We wanted to know what happened to the skin in the meantime.

GRIMES: You mean up to now?

DR. SUSKIND: Up to now. Did they still have changes in the skin? Did they have scars? Did they still have new cysts? Did they still have problems that had to be treated surgically? We found back in 1949 that some of these people had transient liver effects. They were identified in terms of changes in the way the liver functions. So the liver functions were abnormal. Back in 1953 when we came back again and repeated these liver tests they looked normal. OK? We want to know whether or not there were any long term liver effects on these people. Did they have any higher incidents of hepatitis or higher incidents of cirrhosis, and very frankly, from animal experiments which demonstrate that in rats, dioxin is capable of producing liver cancer, was there any risk for liver cancer?

GRIMES: ... Robin first asked you whether or not you had a contract with Monsanto. You indicated, I forget your exact words, but you indicated not yet.

DR. SUSKIND: We have an agreement with them to do this study.

GRIMES: Is there going to be a point where you're going to have a contract with them?

DR. SUSKIND: Well, I think that we really haven't discussed this. All we wanted to make sure of was that Monsanto knew that the design of the experiment and the implementation of the experiment was the responsibility of the University of Cincinnati, under my direction, and that they were absolutely not in collusion in any way the design or the implementation of it. And you know we have contracts with industry like that all the time and that's how they read. And they also read that in no way ever will I represent myself as a representative of the company. Or in no way will the company ever represent themselves as speaking for me. Or representing me.

The other thing which is part of an agreement which we usually have with our supporters is that the data of this study belongs to the investigating group, in this case the University of Cincinnati, and we will make available this data to them and discuss the data as it

"Hey, you need tighter controls" or "Hey you ought to look into this a little more."

DR. SUSKIND: As a matter of fact a parallel study was done by the Department of Environmental Health at the University of Cincinnati. We sent our engineers in, we sent our analytical chemists in and they sampled the material from the runaway reaction, which is often called the accident or the incident. They sampled material from the pot in which trichlorophenol was being made. They sampled 2,4,5-T before it became ground up and afterwards put into bags. They sampled all of that and they wanted to find out what the workers were being exposed to in any part of that process. And they did.

TONER: What year was this?

DR. SUSKIND: Oh, this was — they were brought in in about 1951. We had to be asked to come in. We recognized that in that era there were problems probably unrelated to the health aspects which we could not interfere with. Nevertheless it was a situation in which we were eventually called in and when we were called in to look we made recommendations as to how the plant should be — how the hygienic problems should be handled and there are two reports to that effect. I believe that as a result of that, as a result of our study, a new building was built to make trichlorophenol as well as 2,4,5-T. That was probably done in 1953.

TONER: Did they follow all of your recommendations?

DR. SUSKIND: I really don't know. I have no idea.

MULLINS: Was one of your recommendations to cease production?

DR. SUSKIND: No. You have to understand that in 1949 we did not know about dioxin. We knew it was something related to trichlorophenol. But we didn't know that it was dioxin. And it wasn't until 1957 — eight years later — that dioxin was identified as the agent causing acne and causing liver problems and causing the leukemia.

TONER: At that point did you go to Monsanto and say, "Hey, perhaps you'd better stop production on this material?"

DR. SUSKIND: No. At that time we were doing work of our own and we were not further consulted by Monsanto. There was a continuous correspondence about it and the problem was not discontinuing the production. Because the firm didn't discontinue produc-

DR. SUSKIND: Well, I think that the only thing that I know about this — and I'm only commenting about 2,4,5-T and dioxin and that's about all I can really comment about — I know that there was a process which was in place from 1948 to 1964 and I do know that the industry, whether as a result of our industrial hygiene survey and our medical study or not, did make some changes in the process. They got rid of the building. This was building #1. They attempted to alter their process so that eventually when they knew it was dioxin, the dioxin was reduced. They built a whole new building for it which at the time was a building which I would judge represented their best efforts for a relatively safe process.

Now, there is no absolute safe process — when I start talking to doctors or toxicologists about hazards I start by saying, "Look. There are no safe chemicals. There are only safe ways of using them. And that's true. You know water can be hazardous. You can drown in it. And water in Vietnam caused any amount of disability of soldiers because they developed a unimpressive foot which swelled the soles of their feet and peeled off. And that was water being hazardous. So there are no safe chemicals. There are only safe ways of using them. Whether it's in a food or medicine.

To get back to the answer to your question, when is a good one, did they do everything possible? Our industrial hygiene group and look at the new building when it was built and later felt that it was a safe way of producing trichlorophenol. However, then in 1953 there was no opportunity to know how much dioxin was in the process. Because it wasn't even identified.

Now it so happens that dioxin is so toxic that even very small amounts of it — and we didn't know that until later — even very small amounts of it can be toxic can cause acne and may even be able to cause other things.

MULLINS: Are there any restrictions on your study group at Monsanto as far as medical records?

DR. SUSKIND: We made one of the agreements that Monsanto had to make available to me and to my group all the work records on all the people we were examining. And they did even more than that. They made available all of the work records that we had to choose from. All of their health records from the medical department and all of their compensation records.

GRIMES: Is there a possibility that there are a lot of people who were avid gardeners who have used weed killers containing 2,4,5-T who might have some of the same problems these people have had?

DR. SUSKIND: Well, I have to be very frank with you. There are no obvious effects but it hasn't been studied. Also, you know the same thing is true for Agent Orange. I've had many calls asking why aren't you doing a study of the Vietnam Veterans, and it's a perfectly good question. If I know something about this field why am I not studying the veterans? And the answer was, well, I'm already beginning to study a group and it might be that we could get our answer from this group, because if it's dioxin we're concerned with and 2,4,5-T we're concerned with, these people probably were more heavily exposed than anybody in Viet Nam.

MULLINS: More heavily exposed?

DR. SUSKIND: I think so. And it's a well constituted group. To get the information about who was exposed to what in Vietnam is a... 040558

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Monsanto Seeks EPA Study

Company Claims 'False Controversy' Over Tests

By Robert J. Meyer
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Monsanto Co. has asked the federal government to make an "impartial review" of two tests of workers exposed to dioxin to settle what Monsanto says is a "false controversy" surrounding the studies' accuracy.

Dioxin is a toxic byproduct of some chemical processes.

Monsanto wants the studies, which were conducted by the company, to be examined by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

Critics contend that Monsanto's research was flawed.

The studies, published in scientific journals in 1980 and 1983, failed to find any chronic health effects of dioxin exposure other than chloracne, a serious form of acne.

Monsanto's research involves workers at Monsanto's Nitro, W. Va., plant who were exposed to dioxin. The company analyzed cancer-related deaths of employees who manufactured 2,4,5-T, a herbicide that also was an ingredient in the defoliant Agent Orange used in the Vietnam War.

Monsanto cited the studies in defending a suit brought by residents of Sturgeon, Mo. in 1979. They claimed that their health had been impaired after a railroad accident that caused a spill of 19,000 gallons of wood preservative and a tiny amount — estimated at a teaspoon — of dioxin.

In 1987, an Illinois circuit court jury in Belleville, awarded \$29,000 to a family whose farm was near the accident site and \$1 each to 63 other plaintiffs. But the jury also awarded \$16.25 million in punitive damages.

Monsanto appealed the punitive damages verdict to the Illinois Fifth District Appellate Court in Mount Vernon, Ill.

Monsanto said its Nitro workers' dioxin studies are ac-

curate, adding that they have been unfairly assailed by environmental groups — such as Greenpeace — and an EPA chemist, Cate Jenkins, whose comments do not reflect EPA policy.

"The impartial action [by the federal government] would serve to put an end to this false controversy," Monsanto said in an Oct. 1 letter to EPA. "Absent such government action, Monsanto will continue to suffer damage to its reputation."

Monsanto sent a copy of the letter to the Post-Dispatch.

The letter said that a memorandum written earlier this year by Jenkins contained "untrue allegations" that the company had deliberately under-reported rates of cancer of the Nitro workers.

"Notwithstanding our efforts to correct the record, these baseless charges have been repeated in newspaper accounts and even before a congressional subcommittee," the letter said.

Jenkins didn't return phone calls. In previous interviews, she has said that some of her arguments were taken from plaintiffs' charges in the Sturgeon case.

Dan Bishop, a Monsanto spokesman, said EPA has not responded to the company's letter.

"These allegations have been around for a while," said William H. Farland, an EPA official, in a telephone interview. He runs EPA's office of health and environmental assessment.

Farland added that a NIOSH scientist, Marilyn Fingerhut, is conducting a national study of workers exposed to dioxin. "Her analysis includes the workers at Nitro," Farland said. "Her study will re-examine this. The study is under review [by agency scientists]." Fingerhut didn't return phone calls.

Critics contend that Monsanto's research was flawed.

Oil Prices Hike Steam Heat Rates

By Mark Schlinkmann
Regional Political Correspondent

A steep boost in fuel oil prices due to the Persian Gulf crisis has prompted at least an 18 percent increase in steam heat rates for many downtown commercial and residential buildings.

A temporary six-month rate boost was approved Friday by the Bi-State Development Agency's board for more than three-fourths of Bi-State's 300 steam heat customers. The rate boost will be retroactive to last month.

The rates could jump even higher — or could drop — during the six-month period according to fluctuations in price of fuel oil, which is burned to produce the steam.

Bi-State contracts with St. Louis Thermal Energy Co. to run the steam

that would be too steep.

Bi-State "will monitor the application of these procedures for correctness on a monthly basis for the duration of the emergency," a briefing paper stated.

The board voted unanimously to approve the 18 percent plan, which was recommended by Bi-State executive director John Leary. The board met at Bi-State's East St. Louis garage.

Speaking against the move were representatives of Plaza Square Apartments.

Robbyn Stewart, Plaza Square manager, urged the board to limit the boost to only three months. "We don't know what's going to happen in the Middle East," she said. "There is no ceiling on this."

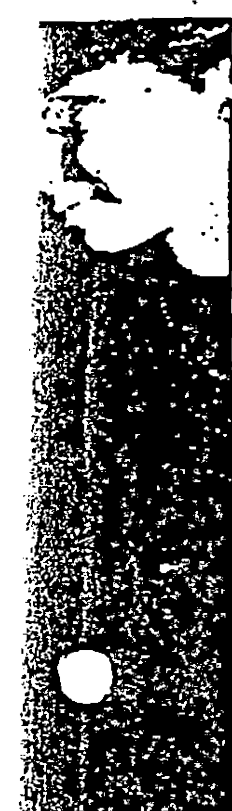
ers downtown to drop steam heat and adopt alternative heating methods.

The end result, she said, would be less business and revenue for Thermal and Bi-State.

Stewart also complained that Bi-State was not imposing a similar rate boost on so-called interruptible customers of steam heat — which have heating systems that can choose to use either steam or natural gas in a given month depending on which is cheaper.

In response, Leary noted in an interview after the meeting that the interruptible customers' rates are determined by a formula tied to the price of natural gas so as to keep steam rates competitive.

When natural gas rates increase, so do steam rates for these customers, he



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Greenpeace, Chemist Challenge Monsanto On Dioxin Findings

By William H. Frelvogel

Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Greenpeace and a whistle-blower at the Environmental Protection Agency are accusing Monsanto Co. of fraudulently understating the health risks of dioxin.

Both the international environmental organization and the EPA chemist called upon the agency to conduct an independent evaluation of what they say are flawed Monsanto studies indicating that dioxin has little health effect on humans.

The EPA chemist, Cate Jenkins, also urged a criminal investigation of the firm, alleging that it covered up evidence of dioxin's ill effects.

A Monsanto spokesman said Wednesday that there appeared to be a criminal inquiry under way and so declined to comment on Jenkins' charges.

But the company said that Greenpeace's allegations were untrue and that the firm stood by the studies. He noted that Monsanto sent a letter to

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the EPA last month asking it to audit the studies to clear the air.

Jenkins, a chemist in the Regulatory Development Branch at EPA, wrote a memo Nov. 15 to the agency's Office of Criminal Investigations accusing the company of a "long pattern of fraud" concerning "dioxin contamination of a wide range of Monsanto Corp. products, as well as health studies of Monsanto's dioxin-exposed workers."

The memo indicates that Jenkins, known at the EPA as a whistle-blower, met Nov. 14 with agents of the National Enforcement Investigations Center, which conducts EPA's criminal inquiries. EPA refused to comment on whether it was conducting a criminal investigation.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace is releasing a report today that, it says, exposes "fraudulent and manipulated science" in Monsanto's studies of the effect of dioxin on workers at its plant in Norcross, Ga. An explosion at the plant in 1983 exposed workers to dioxin.

The Greenpeace report is being released in Washington and at dioxin-contaminated sites around the country, including Times Beach, Mo.

The 26-page report, written by former Shell Oil Co. chemist Pat Costner,

says that studies done for Monsanto in 1980 and 1983 made several key scientific mistakes.

In two studies, for example, some people exposed to dioxin were included in the "control" group.

Because regulators relied on the Monsanto studies as proof that dioxin is not too dangerous to humans, EPA should review all decisions based on those studies, Greenpeace said.

The group also called upon EPA to set up a national dioxin elimination program, which would phase out use of chlorine in the paper industry and chlorinated compounds in pesticides and would eventually ban some wood preservatives.

Dan R. I shop, director of corporate communications at Monsanto, said that most of the allegations by Jenkins and Greenpeace were not new. He said that Jenkins' memo had been based largely upon claims made in a three-year trial in Belleville, Ill., where residents of Sturgeon, Mo., sought damages for exposure to a small amount of dioxin after a train derailment in 1979.

In her memo, Jenkins wrote: "Monsanto covered up the dioxin contamination of a wide range of its products," including lysol, the disinfectant. Members of the Canadian Parliament recently began an investigation of product contamination, she wrote.

The memo also maintained that, according to internal Monsanto documents, samples of herbicides submitted by the company to the Department of Agriculture in the 1970s had been "doctored" and that highly contaminated samples had not been submitted. The memo said that defoliants during the Vietnam War.

The main criticism in Jenkins' memo and the Greenpeace report is targeted at the 1980 and 1983 studies of Monsanto workers, which were supervised by Dr. Raymond Suskind of the Kettering Institute in Cincinnati.

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