COAST SUIT SEEKS DDT DUMPING BAN

Environmental Fund Alleges Discharge Perils Pelican

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LOS ANGELES, Oct. 22—The Environmental Defense Fund filed suit in United States District Court here today to stop the nation's largest maker of DDT from allegedly dumping large quantities of the pesticide into the ocean near the Los Angeles County sewerage system.

The New York-based conservation organization said the discharge was responsible for high findings of DDT in fish and for insipient extinction of the California brown pelican, which eats the fish.

Named as defendants were the Montrose Chemical Corporation of suburban Torrance and the Los Angeles County sanitation districts. Montrose is jointly owned by the Stauffer Chemical Company and Chris-Craft Industries, Inc.

The suit asked for an injunction, contending that the discharge violated nine Federal and state water pollution laws. The suit said the discharges from the White Point Sewage plant into Santa Monica Bay contained as much as 157 parts per billion of chlorinated hydrocarbons, consisting principally of DDT, and that if the plant was discharging only 85 parts per billion of DDT, it was the equivalent of the injection of 100 pounds of DDT per day into the bay.

The chlorinated hydrocarbons are distinctive for their insolubility in water and their tendency to accumulate in animal organs in increasing concentrations in the fish-bird "food chain." Most humans are believed now to have DDT in their bodies. Its effects are not known, but some scientists have suggested perhaps it may cause cancer.

The Federal limit on DDT in foods is five parts per million. Last November, a Los Angeles cannery withdrew 4,000 cases of locally caught mackerel from distribution after the State Health Department found DDT concentrations up to 10 parts per million in it. Last June the Federal Food and Drug Administration condemned 53 cases of Los Angeles mackerel in a New York City warehouse when it was found to contain up to 13 parts per million.

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Today's suit asserted that "anchovies taken from Southern California water had as much as 12.3 parts per million of DDT residues and various fish from Santa Monica Bay contained hundreds of parts per million.

"The only nesting ground for brown pelicans in California in recent years has been Anacapa Island [about 50 miles northwest of Los Angeles]," the complaint continued. "Presently, no normal reproduction of pelicans is occurring on that island. Excessive DDT is supposed to cause unhatchable thin-shelled eggs.

The Environmental Defense Fund has been involved in a number of other losses against DDT.

Since the public furor against DDT arose more than a year ago, the Federal Government in a number of states has restricted its use, but categorical Federal bans on it are still in litigation and upward of six tons a day are still used in the United States.

Montrose, the suit said, makes more than half the DDT now produced in the United States. The current total has not been published, but 1968 production was estimated at 125-million pounds. Most United States production is now exported, Montrose's headquarters is in Newark, N. J.

Company Denies Charge

When informed of the suit, Max Sobelman, vice president of Montrose, said:

"Charges that large amounts of DDT are being dumped into the Pacific Ocean from the Montrose Chemical Corporation of California plant at Torrance are without foundation.

"On the contrary, our company has been commended by the Los Angeles County Sanitation District for the excellent job we have done in keeping DDT out of our effluent.

"County officials have pointed out that our plant contributes only 1 per cent or less of the total DDT found in the sewage passing through the treatment plant."

Richard Marsh, attorney for the sanitation district, said he had discussed the matter with the chief engineer, John Parkhurst. Mr. Parkhurst indicated he had met with Montrose officials to discuss modifying the amount of pollutants they discharged into the sewage system, Mr. Marsh said.

"Until I can see the allegations and study the charges I feel that I cannot comment on the suit," Mr. Marsh added.

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