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Testifies at Hearing Here

Shell Co. Game Manager Denies DDT Is Harmful to Wildlife

By WHITNEY GOULD
(Of The Capital Times Staff)

A Shell Chemical Co. game manager Monday denied that the pesticide DDT is a threat to wildlife, and pointed to increases in the populations of various birds and mammals throughout the U.S.

The witness was William Gusey of Rockville, Md., a wildlife specialist with Shell's agricultural chemicals division. (The Capital Times reported incorrectly last week that Shell makes DDT; it does not.)

Gusey, a former employee of the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and an ex-staff officer with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Pesticides Regulation Division, testified at the state Natural Resources department's continuing hearings on a petition to ban further use of DDT in Wisconsin.

The hearings Monday launched into the third week of testimony in defense of the embattled pesticide, by witnesses for the chemical industry.

Witnesses supporting a ban had earlier linked DDT to the decline in populations of certain birds of prey such as the peregrine falcon, whose calcium metabolism was said to be disrupted by the pesticide. DDT, they found, induces enzymes in the bird's liver which break down sex hormones and lead to thin-shelled eggs.

Gusey admitted that he was no expert on peregrines and other raptors. He said the mammal population of the U. S. was in a "sound state," however, and cited upward trends in the populations of big game, small game, and upland game birds, as well as robins in the eastern half of the country.

He attributed a decrease in the mallard duck population primarily to the decline in wetlands areas with encroaching urbanization. (Laboratory experts in which mallards were fed DDT and experienced subsequent reproductive failures were cited by anti-DDT scientists in the earlier half of the hearings.)

In a review of federal pesticide regulations procedures, Gusey said there were probably more registrations for DDT use than for any other pesticide, and "it would not be uncommon to perhaps review eight to 10 registrations per week."

In an apparent attempt to counter the petitioners' suggestion that DDT registration data is out-of-date, Gusey noted that the USDA had in recent years eliminated recommendations for DDT use as a mosquito larvicide and as an ingredient in filter fly compounds in sewage disposal plants.

It denied registration of a pesticide for dog fly control, he said, and curbed its DDT-for-Dutch elm disease recommendations, after the pesticide was tied to robin mortality. He also asserted that federal agencies have stopped using the pesticide in forests and plague areas.

Gusey acknowledged that federal monitoring efforts (which test pesticide content of water, air and soil) have "some weak spots," partly because by the time one report is prepared, new analysis techniques make it almost obsolete.

The lucky game manager also took a few potshots at what he called "the wildlife and environmental interests," who, he said, "have literally pounded knots into the heads of chemical companies for reported effects on the environment that may have resulted from the use of some chemical."

"It's very easy to criticize," said Gusey. "But criticism is of little value if some sort of remedial action is not offered." He contended that pesticide critics have failed to provide "advice or guidance" to chemical companies, "other than casually."

"About the only thing they (industry) ever heard was 'stop, or ban,' " he complained. "And in a sense this wasn't particularly helpful."

He predicted, however, that industry would make greater use of environmental experts in the future.

In a surprise move late in the afternoon, Madison Atty. Willard Stafford, representing the chemical industry, called as an adverse witness one of the scientists who had testified against DDT in the first part of the department's hearings.

Stafford called Dr. Robert Riesbrough, a marine biologist at the University of California at Berkeley, in an effort to pursue the contention of industry witnesses that the real "villain" in the Great Pesticide Debate is not DDT, but another compound, the "PCB," (polychlorinated biphenyl).

PCBs, plasticizers which are used widely by industry, are, like DDT, found throughout the globe.

Industry witnesses claimed that PCBs also tend to behave much like DDT and its breakdown products in residue detection analyses.

Stafford Monday brandished recent research materials (some of them by Riesbrough himself), which found that PCBs also shared with DDT the capacity to induce enzymes in the liver.

Riesbrough said that although this was true, there is no proof at the moment that PCBs alone can cause thin eggshells.

He said that all available evidence shows that DDE (a breakdown product of DDT which is stored in the body fat of birds, mammals and even man) is "much more responsible" for the thin eggshell phenomenon than PCB.