

CONNECTIONS

WOMEN'S NETWORK ON HEALTH & THE ENVIRONMENT

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WELCOME!

This is the first 'official' edition of our newsletter, so greetings to all of you. We've had two previous issues, in May and August 1994, but we recently landed a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy to help us get a little more professional with our layout and printing. We've also landed quite a few more interested subscribers, so many of you are new to us. For everyone, old and new, some background...

The Women's Network on Health & the Environment (WNH&E) began in the wake of two weekend meetings – one held in May 1993 in Guelph and the second in Toronto in March 1994, both under the sponsorship of the Great Lakes Health Effects Program (a federal initiative of Health Canada). At both meetings, representatives from about 50 groups (mostly around Ontario, but with some welcome U.S. input) were invited to participate, and discuss mutual concerns about the links between human health and environmental pollution. Women from a wide variety of organizations attended – various farm, food, and feminist groups were represented, as well as several health and environmental organizations.

At the end of the Toronto meeting, numerous women (your editor included) expressed an interest in keeping in touch with each other, and expanding our network. So here we are.

Our purpose is to share as much information as possible about the health problems associated with environmental degradation (and to act on these issues; that is, if you agree with the WNH&E draft Policy Statement, page 8). There are many health problems associated with pollution, including cancer (which now strikes one in three Canadians, and particularly breast cancer, which affects one in eight women), reproductive failures and other effects (including birth defects), immune system dysfunctions (such as asthma, allergies and lupus) and endocrine problems – virtually anything that is triggered by synthetic – hence avoidable – pollutants.

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We urge you to act on the information contained in this newsletter. We need passionate, persistent voices on all of these issues, so speak up! (As you may have noticed, the meek aren't inheriting the Earth these days, the transnational corporations are. Women's voices are crucial if we're going to return to a sane, sustainable balance.)



TOO MUCH INFO, TOO LITTLE SPACE (AND TIME...)

Promises, promises! In the more informal editions of this newsletter (back in May and August '94), we kept promising that we'd offer an update of our membership list. Well, no more promises, and (sorry) no list, since we're now up to several hundred newsletter recipients.

But we do hope to catch up with several key issues in the next issue of our newsletter, for which there was little time (and even less space) to include in this edition:

- ◆ update on the activities/report of Ontario Task Force on the Primary Prevention of Cancer
- ◆ detailed news about the upcoming Breast Cancer and the Environment film (see page 10)
- ◆ annotated list of cancer/environment research projects
- ◆ Ontario's pesticide review.
- ◆ Correspondence from Network members

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WNH&E is a project of the Women and Environments Education and Development (WEED) Foundation



HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY: HORSE MANURE?

Ever wonder where the active ingredient in the widely-prescribed hormone replacement drug *Premarin* comes from? That's right: Pregnant mares' urine (no, not manure, although figuratively we're not so sure). For many farmers in Manitoba, this substance is liquid gold. But for a whole variety of other reasons, such as the increased risk of breast cancer attributed to hormone replacement therapy, animal rights, and overloaded waste treatment facilities, you should read the article about Premarin entitled: "Superjuice: A Perilous Prescription" in the December '94 issue of *Equinox* magazine. (Or see our order form to obtain a reprint).



WELCOME SHARYN, VERONICA & KATERINA

Tired of calling The WEED Foundation office and getting the message machine? We're pleased to say we now have three women hard at work here in the basement of the Bathurst Street Centre for Peace and Justice who will be here when you call or fax (at least close by, and will get back to you fast!). We're pleased to introduce Sharyn Inward, Veronica Hann and Katerina Novak, who are mainly working on The WEED Foundation's "Stop The Whitewash" campaign, but are also keenly interested in our network and all its related cancer prevention and other health issues. Don't hesitate to call! 416-516-2600.

(And what is "Stop the Whitewash"? It's a campaign that focuses on the unnecessary chlorine-bleaching of all those billions of so-called 'sanitary' products – single-use disposable tampons, menstrual pads, infant diapers and incontinence products. It was launched in Spring 1992 in the wake of the publication of the HarperCollins book, *Whitewash*, by WEED Foundation members Adrienne Scott and Liz Armstrong. We have plenty of information here at The WEED office about the problems associated with chlorine bleaching and waste, as well as lists of safer, more environment-friendly alternatives.)

MEETINGS GALORE!

ACTION FOR CANCER PREVENTION

On the breast cancer/environment issue, there have been a bundle of meetings these past few months. In this issue of *Connections*, we offer brief summaries of two – in Albuquerque and Boston – that focused on environmental links to cancer. Both events were co-sponsored by

Greenpeace USA and the Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO), New York, as part of the project "Women, Health and the Environment: Action for Cancer Prevention". (See the enclosed Consensus Statement; we as the Women's Network on Health & the Environment have already signed on, and hope that many more groups will too.)

We also make mention of a November 16 meeting in Toronto. This latter event was sponsored by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, which issued not one, but two disclaimers at the outset of the evening about its neutrality on the evening's topic, "Breast Cancer and the Environment?" (Yes, that is a question mark.) In our view, it's hard to imagine any breast cancer group in the mid-1990s still questioning whether all those carcinogens in our air, soil, water and food actually cause cancer...Did the docs make life difficult for the CBCF?

Clearly, our American sisters are several steps ahead of us in making the links between cancer and environmental degradation. Politically, they're also way ahead, with strong grass roots movements pushing the agenda very powerfully in many areas of the U.S.

But there is a lot of activity about to burst forth here in Canada in 1995. At least four major meetings are on the drawing board for this year and next in Ontario – Ottawa, Toronto, Kingston and St. Catharines. We'll keep you posted about these events as they firm up. The Ottawa panel is imminent: to be held Thursday February 23.

Meanwhile:

ALBUQUERQUE NEW MEXICO

October 14-15, 1994: Robyn Seydel and friends, under the banner of LaMontanita Food Co-op, gathered together a superb slate of participants for this breast cancer and the environment forum.

Just a few of the outstanding speakers at Albuquerque included Dr. Devra Lee Davis, proponent of the very credible hypothesis that breast cancer incidence rises as women's lifetime exposure to both natural and/or 'xeno' (foreign) estrogens increases; Dr. Samuel Epstein, University of Chicago epidemiologist and long-time critic of the cancer establishment; epidemiologist Dr. Marilyn Fingerhut of the U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH); Dr. Sandra Steingraber, Radcliffe College professor of biology; Dr. Jay Gould, statistician and co-author (with Benjamin A. Goldman) of "Deadly Deceit: Low Level Radiation, High Level Cover-up"; and Joan D'Argo of Greenpeace in Chicago (also one of the principal movers and shakers in the campaign "Women, Health and the Environment: Action for Cancer Prevention").

Dr. Sam Epstein presented an up-to-date summary of the causes of breast cancer, presented here in point form. In typically passionate fashion, Dr. Epstein preceded his talk with an admonition to breast cancer activists not to get co-opted by the establishment into buying into "more research and more mammography", as he feels some groups already have; or to focus on just one cause, such as organochlorines; or to emphasize breast cancer statistics alone, as the **1 in 9** group in New York does. The incidence of many other cancers, such as prostate, testicular and colon cancer have also increased enormously in recent decades, Dr. Epstein noted, so to look solely at breast cancer is to fragment the pie. "The whole pie is one in three!" That's what North Americans need to know about cancer statistics, he believes, and we agree – all the better to mobilize as many people as possible against this tragic epidemic.

Dr. Epstein named a host of causes for breast cancer, to be found in air, water, food, radiation and medicines; that is, they're 'multi-factorial'. "We are faced with a whole slew of avoidable causes."

♦ First, he noted that the 'unavoidable' risk factors – those which are familial/genetic in origin, plus exposure to natural estrogens (through early menarche/late menopause, late births or no children at all) – account for about 20 percent of breast cancer incidence.

The avoidable causes include:

♦ chlorinated organics, such as some chlorine-based pesticides. Dr. Epstein says scientists have known since the early 1950s that chlorinated pesticides induce breast cancer in rodents, and that there was evidence of the estrogenic effects of DDT well before 1950. "It was known that young mice exposed to DDT would get to sexual maturity very quickly, but this evidence was totally ignored by the establishment."

♦ food additives, such as hormones in cattle feed. Dr. Epstein believes that pesticides are probably a relatively minor cause of estrogenic effects compared to food additives. He pointed out that until 1960, DES (diethylstilbestrol, the potent estrogen used therapeutically to prevent miscarriages, which caused high rates of certain cancers in the offspring of users) was also used as a cattle feed additive. Then when DES was banned, the pharmaceutical and cattle industries introduced so-called 'natural' estrogens, which are still problematic. Dr. Epstein says that currently animal meat products are the #1 cause of high estrogen levels.

♦ with respect to occupational causes, it has been known since the late 1970s that there have been excess rates of breast cancer in workers in polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic plants. There is also 'highly suggestive' evidence that both electrical and petrochemical workers experience higher than average rates of breast cancer.

♦ where you live may also increase your risk of breast cancer: for example, proximity to hazardous waste sites, including nuclear dump sites, both significantly increase chances of breast cancer.

♦ nuclear radiation from weapons testing is also a significant contributor to higher breast cancer incidence. Dr. Epstein noted that in Nevada alone, there were more than 200 tests in the 1950s and 60s.

♦ diagnostic and medical radiation are also very important causes of breast cancer. Dr. Epstein refers to National Mammogram Day (October 19 in the U.S. this year) as National Mammoscam Day. He claims the uselessness of pre-menopausal mammograms has been known "for decades". The average post-menopausal cancer is eight to nine years old; pre-menopausal cancers grow much faster. He adds that one of every three or four positives found in scans of pre-menopausal women turn out to be non-cancerous, and there are a significant number of false negatives (approximately

20 percent). Dr. Epstein also maintains there is no safe dose of radiation; the effects are cumulative, with each dose adding to prior exposures. The pre-menopausal breast is highly sensitive to radiation, Dr. Epstein contends, and mammography can interact with other forms of radiation.

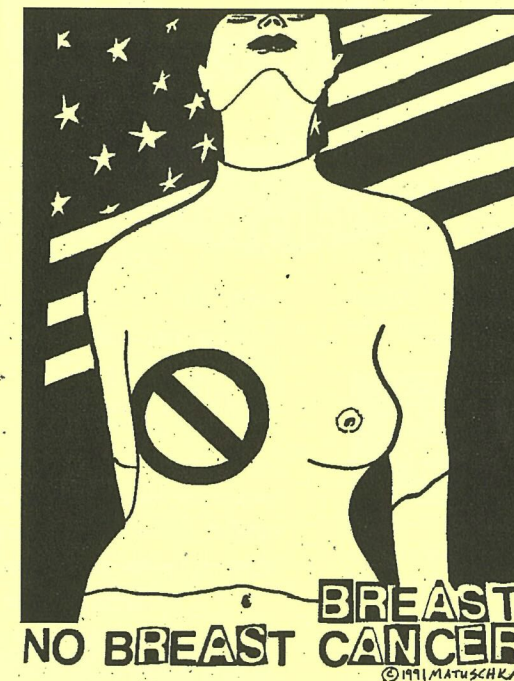
♦ there is also good evidence of the interaction between radiation and estrogens. Rats given low doses of estrogen show a slight increase in breast cancer; but then given x-rays, show a "massive, explosive" incidence of breast cancer.

♦ although the evidence is "not necessarily conclusive", Dr. Epstein says there is reason for concern that forceful compression of the breast (as in mammography) can crush cancer capsules, and open up blood vessels.

Three other issues noted by Dr. Epstein include:

♦ the risk of breast cancer as a result of **breast implants** ("If you were to ask how best to induce breast cancer, then polyurethane breast implants are the perfect system to discharge carcinogens to breast tissue.")

♦ "strong reasons for concern" about recombinant **Bovine Growth Hormone** and the risk of breast cancer (a peer-reviewed article by Dr. Epstein on this topic will appear in a coming issue of the *International Journal of Health*



Services. More in our next newsletter.

♦ **tamoxifen**, which is a relative of the chemical DES but "infinitely worse" says Dr. Epstein, is touted by the cancer establishment to reduce the risk of breast cancer in high risk women by about one-third. This claim is "tenuous in the extreme", counters Dr. Epstein, adding that tamoxifen is an "unusually active carcinogen."

Eminently sensible, Dr. Epstein concluded by saying that we all have a right to know what is in our food, as well as in our household goods and cosmetics. We're told about cholesterol, but not carcinogens. (An interesting point, which reminds us of a brochure about breast cancer published by the Canadian Cancer Society. In the section, "How to prevent cancer", one item encourages us to "Learn to avoid cancer producing substances at work, home and in the community", but never names these carcinogens, or suggests a helpful source for this information...)

BOSTON MASSACHUSETTS

October 28-29, 1994: A superb two-day event sponsored by the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, in conjunction with WEDO and Greenpeace USA. (Editor's note: And what a beautiful city downtown Boston is! All we eastern Canadians ever hear is New York, New York, New York. Boston surely has to be right up there among the U.S.'s most interesting cities. We walked our feet off every moment of free time, and could have spent many days more doing the same).

Like Albuquerque, this event featured numerous outstanding speakers, including – during the Saturday session at Northeastern University – Dr. Devra Lee Davis (again!), Dr. Peter Montague, editor of *Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly* (which we regularly excerpt in this newsletter) and Dr. Richard Clapp, Director, JSI Center for Environmental and Health Studies, Boston University, as well as a superb panel that included Rita Arditti of the Women's Community Cancer Project, Boston; Nancy Evans of Breast Cancer Action (the original one out of San Francisco!) and Diane Dillon-Ridgley, WEDO, New York.

The Friday event was slated "A Day of Testimony" and held at the elegant State House in Boston. The moderator was the compelling (as well as very funny) Bella Abzug, former Congresswoman, co-founder of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), breast cancer survivor, and feminist extraordinaire, to cite just a few of her credentials. Testimonials included expert presenters on a wide variety of topics, including: organochlorines, environmental estrogens, pesticides, low level radiation, the breast cancer

gene, environmental justice, nuclear radiation, food irradiation/bovine growth hormone and electromagnetic fields.

Joan D'Argo of Greenpeace Chicago also spoke about "Justice, Greed and Corruption", and we've included a few excerpts from her speech, which points out the immense shortcomings of risk assessment. See Quotable Quotes, pages 11 & 12).

Dr. Ana Soto, Tufts University School of Medicine, was another of the many presenters at the day of testimony, as well as a speaker at the press conference which began the morning's events. She and her Tufts U. colleague, Dr. Carlos Sonnenschein, are well known for their discovery that nonylphenols leaking from plastic test tubes used in cancer experiments themselves caused cancer. This surprise finding was reported to the FDA back in 1989, but no action was taken! according to Dr. Soto. Here is a summary of her presentation:

♦ Man-made chemicals released into the environment have been found to produce deleterious health effects in wildlife and, due to occupational exposure, in humans. These affect the endocrine, reproductive and nervous systems.

♦ Chemicals that mimic estrogen act cumulatively. That is, if each chemical is present at concentrations below that needed to produce a deleterious effect, the sum of several of these chemicals may reach an effective dose. This means that it will be almost impossible to determine a 'safe' level of exposure.

♦ A given chemical may produce diverse effects, which strike different organs. For example, DDT metabolites (break-down chemicals) not only mimic estrogen, but they also antagonize male hormones and are toxic to the nervous system.

♦ Unrelated compounds, such as estrogen mimics and heavy metals, may act in concert to affect areas of the brain that control reproduction.

♦ For all these reasons, we advise a proactive measure, that is, to test chemicals for their hormone mimicry and their ability to interfere with reproduction before they are released into the environment. We have already developed assays that allow testing for estrogenicity, anti-estrogenicity, androgenicity and anti-androgenicity. This development now makes it possible to screen chemicals for these effects before they are released into the environment.

Finally, Dr. Soto concluded, the brave new world attitude of the 1950s, proclaiming that we were to conquer Nature should be changed. We must acknowledge that we can at best grasp only a little of the unfathomable complexity of Nature. Our actions may have deleterious effects we cannot foresee. Who

would have guessed that DDT was going to have estrogen-like properties? Therefore, research will be necessary to begin to understand these issues. We have not yet developed the intellectual tools to analyze complexity. We must do so. Our best venue to avoid unforeseen consequences is restraint. We strongly believe that chemicals have to be proven harmless before they are released into the environment.

*{Editor's note: With all due respect to Dr. Soto, who is a dedicated and brilliant scientist, we must note that her conclusions are nearly identical to those espoused by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* over 30 years ago.}*

SILENT SPRING INSTITUTE: \$\$\$ FOR BREAST CANCER STUDY

At the Boston conference, a great announcement – \$1.2 million (US) was awarded to the Silent Spring Institute by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to study potential environmental links to breast cancer on Cape Cod. (Why Cape Cod? Seven of the ten towns in Massachusetts with the highest incidence of breast cancer are on Cape Cod). This all-women project will work toward generating and testing viable hypotheses about likely environmental and behavioral causes of the high rates of breast cancer on Cape Cod. For more information, contact the **Silent Spring Institute (617-266-6363)** or the **Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition at 617-423-MBCC**.

TORONTO

November 16, 1994: Despite its apparent ambivalence about the topic of breast cancer and the disease's environmental links, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation (Ontario Chapter) nonetheless assembled a sparkling panel of speakers: Dr. Devra Lee Davis (yes, she is everywhere!), Dr. Susan Sieber, Deputy Director of Cancer Etiology, National Cancer Institute, Washington DC (and a breast cancer survivor) who is currently researching environmental contaminants, particularly organochlorines and the risk of breast cancer; and Dr. Ross Hume Hall, past Canadian Chair of the Human Health Committee, International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes, who is an expert in human biochemistry and environmental toxicology. Keynote speaker was the Honourable Ruth Grier, Minister of Health for Ontario, and the moderator was Jacqueline Pelletier, President of the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues.

Some words of wisdom from this November 16 event:

Hon. Ruth Grier: "You know, as well as I do, that breast cancer is not just a women's disease. It is a public health issue. We can no longer afford to let environmental causes and factors languish

like the poor step-child of cancer research."

Dr. Ross Hume Hall: "I have an image. It's one of a woman standing alone. Before this woman are two paths. There's a sign over the first path that reads: One out of every eight women who takes this path will have breast cancer. And for your daughter and granddaughters who follow, the rate may be one in six, one in four. But there is also a second path before this woman. The sign simply says: 'This is the public health path to prevention.' But there's a shocker here, because the public health path is blocked. The woman cannot take it...."

COPP-OUT ON CHLORINE

We were heartened earlier this year when the very conservative International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes (IJC) called not only for 'zero discharge' of persistent toxic chemicals, but for the elimination of chlorine as an industrial feedstock. (For more information about chlorine's multitude of environmental sins, contact Greenpeace for its excellent report, **Chlorine, Human Health and the Environment: The Breast Cancer Warning**. Also **Achieving Zero Dioxin**. GP's phone number in Toronto is **416-345-8408**).

But in October our federal government squirmed out from under election promises. (We should know by now most election promises aren't worth the paper they're printed on.)

Some background: During last year's federal election, the much-touted Red Book committed a Liberal government to banning and phasing out persistent toxic chemicals. In another document, the Liberals promised to "commit Canada to decisive regulatory action, through the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) or other legislative instruments, to match {U.S.} EPA regulatory efforts in regard to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence ecosystem. A Liberal government commits itself to regulatory initiatives whose standards will never be less stringent than those required by the IJC or those in the U.S."

Well, in early February this year, U.S. President Bill Clinton called for a "national strategy for substituting, reducing or prohibiting the use of chlorine and chlorinated compounds" as part of his proposals for re-authorization of the Clean Water Act. So we expected Environment Minister Sheila Copps to act 'decisively'. Instead, in her own words, Ottawa has decided to 'prune the chlorine tree, not cut it down'. Instead of moving to phase out about 14,000 chlorine-based chemicals, only a tiny handful of which have been tested for their long-term impact on human health, the government will restrict to levels that cannot be monitored a few compounds, and require voluntary controls on a few others. This is particularly dangerous because many compounds, such as the pesticide trifluralin, cannot be detected with current monitoring practices in Ontario.

Environmental groups across Canada joined forces to denounce the proposal, and we're now waiting to see what the outcome will be. We fear it may be a "done deal."

As even the *Globe and Mail* (Canada's very conservative business newspaper) put it on October 26, "Almost all of the {chlorine} reduction will be made on the backs of pulp and paper companies, which has already cut consumption by 385,000 tonnes since 1988 by phasing out chlorine {gas} as a bleaching agent in paper-making." Good start, but we ask: What about polyvinyl chloride (plastic) production, a host of chlorine-based pesticides like atrazine and lindane (known to be endocrine disrupters, and therefore possible contributors to cancer and a slew of other health effects), and a wide range of industrial solvents, such as those used for dry cleaning?

As Paul Muldoon of the Canadian Environmental Law Association commented, "It's not pruning the tree, it's essentially picking up a few leaves." (Needless to say, the President of the Canadian Chemical Producers Association was pleased by the government's approach).

If you'd like to remind our government that it is possible to save jobs and have a sustainable environment at the same time, Ms. Copps can be reached in Ottawa at (819) 997-1441 or fax (819) 953-3457, or by writing to: Honourable Sheila Copps, Minister of Environment, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6.

(Late note: To her credit, Ms Copps at least spoke out on behalf of a complete environmental assessment for the problem-riddled Nuclear Generating Station in Pickering, supporting the demand put forward by the activist group Nuclear Awareness, and which the AECB had denied days earlier...)

HOT FLASH!

The Ontario government has rejected proposed limits on tritium by the ACES Committee. Please sign and send the attached letter to Premier Bob!

DUTCH DIOXIN STUDIES CONFIRM EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

Our last newsletter (*Connections* #2, August 29/94) contained information on why Canadian standards for the daily intake of dioxin were no longer acceptable or safe. New evidence, such as the US Environmental Protection Agency's Dioxin Reassessment (issued in September '94) confirms that dioxin is more dangerous than was previously thought, and again underscores the dire need to chop down the whole chlorine tree, and not just prune it a wee bit (as the Hon. Ms Copps proposes).

Greenpeace released a video in September (copies of this five-minute video can be borrowed from the WNH&E library. See

order form) that the at the largest study yet of the effects of dioxins and PCBs (poly-chlorinated biphenyls) on the general population. This study was commissioned by the Dutch government as a result of the "Lickebaert Affair" in 1989, in which dioxin and PCB contamination of cows' milk was traced back to the AVR incinerator in Rotterdam. Subsequently, dioxins and PCBs were also found to have contaminated breast milk over permitted levels.

The research was conducted in three centres in the Netherlands, and 200 mother/baby pairs were selected from the general population. Researchers tested the babies' dioxin and PCB exposure by measuring the levels of these contaminants in both umbilical cord blood and in breast milk to discern at what stage of the child's

development the PCBs and dioxins were having their effect. The study concluded that the child is exposed both before birth through the placenta and after birth through breast milk.

As early as 10 day's old, babies highly exposed to dioxin had a lower quality muscle tone, and less developed reflexes. These effects were observed again at three months.

Researchers also found that high dioxin exposure could also be linked to dysfunctions of the thyroid gland and a lower birth weight. Although some muscle tone effects disappeared at 18 months, researchers are sufficiently concerned to have planned follow-up studies on the children when they are three-and-a-half and seven years old. They're also worried the effects may reappear at a later stage of development.

These findings were presented on September 8th, 1994 at The Hague. They were also presented and discussed at a closed

meeting last April together with researchers from six other countries investigating dioxins and PCBs. Representatives from the US EPA were also present at this meeting.

(Recent animal research had added even more weight to the theory that dioxins and PCBs present in mothers' breast milk is interfering with Vitamin K metabolism. Vitamin K deficiency has been linked to late hemeuretic disease in newborn babies. This disease is characterized by massive bleeding in the brain and is almost always fatal. It has become normal practice since this theory was put forward by Professor Janna Koppe in Amsterdam for hospitals in industrialized countries to supply breast feeding mothers with Vitalin K supplement. Since this practice started, the incidence of late hemeuretic disease has fallen to almost zero. But the larger question is, of course, why do we need to keep trying to find cures for diseases/conditions that could easily be prevented in the first place – that is, if toxins weren't permeating our lives!)

Given all the evidence, we think it's past time the Canadian government came to its senses and implemented a dioxin elimination plan. We'll keep you up to date on this issue, and suggest further action to take. (For a critique on the Canadian dioxin standards and what you can do, please see *Connections* #2. Available on the order form if you don't already have it.)

BOVINE GROWTH HORMONE

LET'S JOIN TOGETHER TO KEEP THE PRESSURE ON!

In our opinion, if there is one issue that we as Canadians can 'win', it's to stop genetically-engineered Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH), also known as recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (rBST) from coming to Canada. This drug, now being marketed under the trade name Posilac by the giant multinational, Monsanto, increases milk production in cows by up to 20-25 percent.

As we've said in earlier issues of this newsletter (the two 'unofficial' editions) rBGH has already been adopted in the United States, but here in Canada, there is a moratorium to prevent distribution of the hormone at least until this summer (i.e...sooner than we think).

There are essentially three reasons to **JUST SAY NO** to rBGH:

- 1) It may be dangerous to human health, and has not been adequately tested.

- 2) It will affect the health of many milk cows, rendering them highly susceptible to the udder infection, mastitis, and other ailments. Antibiotics are used to treat mastitis and, the argument goes, overexposure of humans to antibiotics can make us more vulnerable to certain infections in an era when antibiotic resistance is already a serious problem.

3) We already have enough milk and dairy products.

CBC's *fifth estate* (November 29) presented an excellent segment on rBGH, pointing out, among other things that Monsanto tried to fast-track Posilac in Canada by offering Health Canada \$1 to \$2 million on condition that the company receive approval to market its drug in Canada without being required to submit data from any further studies or trials. It was a woman in the Bureau of Veterinary Drugs – Dr. Margaret S. Hayden – who blew the whistle on Monsanto by alerting the RCMP to this attempted bribe.

Officially, no decision has yet been made by Health Canada about Posilac. Putting pressure on your local MP, Minister of Agriculture Ralph Goodale (phone: 613-996-2508; fax: 613-996-9129), your local supermarket/milk store will all help stop rBGH before it gets started in Canada. To this end, we've enclosed a petition for your Member of Parliament, the brainchild of a deeply concerned mother of four in Orillia, Ontario who (like us) thinks the whole idea of rBGH is really stupid. (In the next issue of *Connections*, we'll offer a whole lot more on rBGH).



SAYING NO TO NO LABELING!

The rBGH issue in Canada is part of a much larger concern about genetically-engineered foods in general. As you may know, the joint UN/WHO organization known by the rather arcane name, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, sets food safety standards for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It met in Ottawa in late October to propose international guidelines for the labeling of all genetically-engineered foods. In the run-up to the conference, it was expected that the United States would present a position paper opposing any labeling of g-e food, which if accepted by GATT and the World Trade Organization, would deny nations (including Canada) the right to inform consumers that food products had been created using gene-splicing technology. **GOOD NEWS!** At the Ottawa event, the **International Network on Genetically-Engineered Foods** held its first protest action. The subsequent media attention, as well as inter-government disagreements, forced the US to withdraw its position paper for the time being (a new paper will be submitted for review in 1995). For more information about the **International Network**, the address/phone/fax is: 1130 17th Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: 202-466-2823 or fax: 202-429-9602. By mid-October, organizers expected more than 500 NGOs from 70 nations to be involved in the network by the end of 1994, and to have signed on to its statement demanding pre-market testing and mandatory labeling of all genetically-engineered foods. Your group is invited to join up in 1995!

What are we?

A NETWORK OR A COALITION?

IT'S YOUR TURN!

We invite your feedback on the following policy statement, which we hope is Step 1 (of very few steps) in reaching a consensus that will enable a core group of members to speak out on behalf of the Women's Network on Health & the Environment (WNH&E), and truly represent all groups/individuals who belong to the network.

The original intent of WNH&E at the time of our launch in March '94 was simply to keep in touch with one another by sharing information. However, there are so many issues (such as the proposed introduction of rBGH into the Canadian milk supply, breast cancer whitewashes, the debate over hormone replacement therapy, government chicken-heartedness, and so on) that demand public criticism, we're having a hard time just sharing information. We need to speak out and take action! (In fact, we have already been doing so on several fronts, such as pesticide regulation in Ontario, but would much prefer to have your official blessing.)

Please let us know what your comments, suggestions for improvements, deletions/additions, to this draft policy etc. by February 15, 1995. If any current WNH&E member cannot sign on to this statement, please let us know that too. We'll assume that silence (ie. no response from you) means consent. In the next issue of the newsletter, we'll let you know where this statement stands, and changes that have been recommended.

DRAFT WNH&E POLICY STATEMENT

"The purpose of the Women's Network on Health & the Environment (WNH&E) is to make connections between deteriorating health, including such diseases as breast cancer and endometriosis, and environmental degradation.

We believe in environmental justice for all women, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, religion, age, abilities/disabilities or sexual orientation.

Our aim is to share information with network members and others about a variety of environmental issues, such as pesticides, the nuclear fuel chain, and toxic chemicals, which have a detrimental effect on women's health and the health of all living beings. We also support 'zero discharge' of persistent toxic chemicals (including radionuclides) and the 'reverse onus' principle, which requires users of chemicals and other potentially dangerous substances to prove that any discharges into

the environment are safe (rather than putting the onus on citizens to prove after the fact that pollutants are harmful).

Our mandate includes speaking out against:

- ♦ unacceptable government standards on environmental matters
- ♦ corporate, military and community practices that pollute;

and speaking out on behalf of all clean production methods that promote sustainability.

Our commitment is to collaborate with women most directly affected by environmental degradation, such as farmers and workers in the manufacturing, chemical and nuclear industries, as well as marginalized communities, including aboriginal peoples, women of colour, poor women, lesbians and others.

We believe we have a right to live in communities where the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and places we work are clean and poison-free.

To this end, we support the work of groups such as the International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes, and the joint Women's Environment and Development Organization/Greenpeace USA project, **Women, Health and the Environment: Action for Cancer Prevention***

We invite all women who share these goals to join us in this work, and to become part of our growing network."

** Many of the ideas (and even the language!) for our WNH&E statement comes from the joint WEDO-Greenpeace project's consensus statement, which we are encouraging all groups to endorse. A copy is enclosed.*



Please address your suggestions about the draft WNH&E policy statement to Liz Armstrong, (editor of Connections), Women's Network on Health & the Environment, c/o The WEED Foundation, 736 Bathurst Street, Toronto M5S 2R4. (Or jot them on the order form) Thanks!



GREAT BOOKS ABOUT BREAST CANCER! ORDER YOURS TODAY!

There have been a flurry of excellent books about breast cancer in recent months, with more to come soon.

♦ **PATIENT NO MORE: THE POLITICS OF BREAST CANCER**

One book we very highly recommend is **PATIENT NO MORE: THE POLITICS OF BREAST CANCER** by journalist Sharon Batt, who is also co-founder of the activist group Breast Cancer Action Montreal. In the November 1994 edition of *Canadian Forum* magazine, reviewer Julie Mason gave **Patient No More** excellent marks: "Her book is a searing and totally convincing indictment of the primitive state of breast cancer treatment and prevention. Batt surveys the history of treatment for the disease, including a horrifying survivor's account of a mastectomy done in 1810 without benefit of anesthetic. Grateful as she is for modern surgical techniques, Batt points out that 'in the gray zones of medical theory, ethics, values and politics, I also saw parallels to contemporary breast surgery.'"

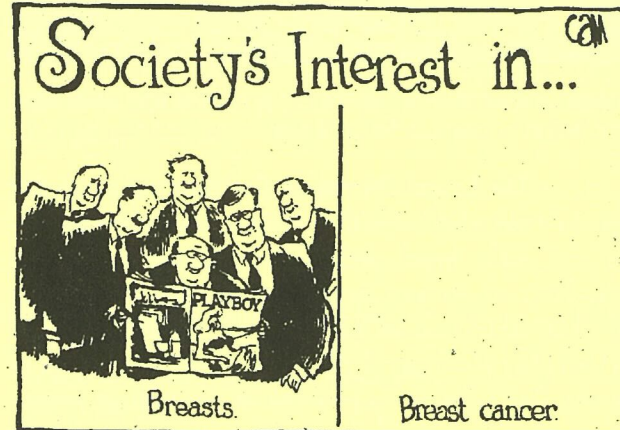
"Like surgery," Mason's review goes on to say, "chemotherapy and radiation as treatment for breast cancer are also mired in controversy – a controversy that confronts every woman who is diagnosed with the disease. Does chemotherapy cure or eventually kill? At what stage is radiation worth the risk? Should high-risk women take powerful drugs to prevent recurrence? Still in the state of shock over the diagnosis, a woman must try to find her way through a maze of conflicting guidelines, information, attitudes, and statistics in order to determine the best treatment for her stage of the disease."

Batt also includes an excellent chapter on environmental pollutants as possible causes of breast cancer. In our opinion, this is a must read for every Canadian woman, as well as all those oncologists and health care professionals who – along with the rest of us – should be up in arms about Canada's shocking cancer statistic.

If you'd like to order **Patient No More** from us here at WNH&E, we have several copies on hand. Please see the attached order form.

Another of the very best books about cancer and activism is **1 IN 3: WOMEN WITH CANCER CONFRONT AN EPIDEMIC** by San Francisco activist and writer extraordinaire Judy Brady. We also have a few copies of this book here at WNH&E. You need it! (See order form)

By the time this issue of the newsletter reaches you, a new book about breast cancer by veteran Ottawa political writer and right-winger



Claire Hoy should be at bookstores. It will be interesting to see what Hoy has to say about this issue; his first wife died of breast cancer in the 1970s, and he was last seen (at least in these circles) attending a series of meetings about breast cancer and its environmental links. Given his reputation for being such a can-tankerous soul (no bleeding heart is Hoy), we're very curious.

Former International Joint Commission scientist (and recently retired McMaster professor) Dr. Ross Hume-Hall also has a book in the works about breast cancer and the environment, as does Dr. Sandra Steingraber in Boston. No word on publication dates yet (but we'll let you know). Dr. Steingraber is also author of a book of poetry called **POST DIAGNOSIS** scheduled to be released this Spring. (We heard excerpts in Albuquerque – exceptional!)

NATIONAL PESTICIDE-FREE WEEK

Citizens for Alternatives to Pesticides (CAP) is a Quebec-based group that's getting the ball rolling nationally on the urban pesticide issue. According to CAP Co-ordinator Merryl Hammond, the response to CAP's recent suggestion for a cross-Canada anti-pesticide week has been extremely enthusiastic.

Hence, the week preceding Earth Day, which falls in 1995 on Saturday, April 22, has been declared (at least by CAP and its associates, and perhaps will be by Environment Minister Sheila Copps too) **National Pesticide-Free Week**.

If you're interested in getting your community involved, CAP has a Pesticide Action Kit for sale. The kit comes complete with relevant stats, quotable quotes, quick facts, summary of the issues, ideas about things to do locally to raise awareness, sample letters to MPs, and so on.

To order, contact **Merryl Hammond, CAP, 20 Sunny Acres, Baie d'Urfé, PQ H9X 3B6**. Phone: 514-457-4347. Fax: 514-457-4840. The cost for the kit is \$10, plus postage. (As they say in those Franklin Mint ads, you need send no money now. Merryl will bill you when she sends the kit.) This is a project really well worth supporting.

RESOURCES

Here are just a few you that may help in your own grass roots work. More to come in future issues.

♦ **The Cancer Prevention Coalition** is a group that began in 1992 when more than 60 experts in cancer prevention and public health declared in Washington, DC that Richard Nixon's *War on Cancer* (launched 1971) had been lost since most cancer rates are still on the rise. Dr. Sam Epstein of the University of Chicago is the prime mover and shaker in this one. (See notes on his presentation about cancer prevention in our summary of the Albuquerque meeting in this issue). The CPC publishes a quarterly newsletter, which (like this one) is so far free! More information: **CPC, 520 N. Michigan Ave. #410, Chicago, IL 60611.** Phone: 312-467-0600 fax: 312-467-0599.

♦ **Rachel's Environment & Health Weekly:** a very valuable resource. It's brief (one 100% recycled 8 1/2 x 11" sheet double-sided weekly) about a variety of issues including incineration, pesticides, bovine growth hormone, nuclear fuel problems, cancer prevention and lately, more and more about successful grass roots' strategies. Good analysis of the issues. More info: **RE&HW, Environmental Research Foundation, P.O. Box 5036, Annapolis, MD 21403-7036.** Phone: 410-263-1584 fax: 410-263-8944; Internet erf@igc.apc.org.

♦ **The Alliance of Breast Cancer Survivors (ABCs),** Toronto, publishes a regular newsletter and has a very feisty support group. The Winter 1994 issue of ABCs Notes had an excellent story about the drug Taxol and its availability (or lack of it) to breast cancer survivors. More information: **ABCs, 20 Eglinton Avenue West, Box 2035, Toronto ON M4K 1K8.** Phone: 416-487-9899 fax: 416-487-0584.

♦ **The Women's Community Cancer Project** is the mother of all feisty cancer support groups any time, anywhere. They're intelligent, politically active, highly committed, very compassionate and (hooray!) they have a great time doing it all. They have their own list of excellent resources, which you can obtain by writing or calling: **WCCP, The Women's Center, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge MA 02139.** Phone: 617-354-9888.

♦ **A Guide to Unconventional Cancer Therapies** is available from the Ontario Breast Cancer Exchange Project. It's getting very good reviews! Cost is \$10 plus shipping and handling. Phone: 905-727-3300 fax: 905-727-2620.

COMING EVENTS

Here are just a few. If you have more (of anything, not just events) for our next issue, the deadline is February 25, '95. Please write, phone or fax **WNH&E, c/o The Women and Environments Education and Development (WEED) Foundation, 736 Bathurst Street, Toronto ON M5S 2R4.** Phone: 416-516-2600; fax: 416-531-6214 (shared fax; must say c/o WEED)

♦ **Women, Breast Cancer and the Environment: Action for Prevention, Thursday, February 23, 1995, 7:00 p.m., National Library Auditorium, Ottawa.** An event jointly sponsored by The Women's Environmental Network (Ottawa), Breast Cancer Action Ottawa and even some from The WEED Foundation in Toronto. More info: Marti Mussell, Phone: 613-739-8814

♦ **Survivors in Search of a Voice: The Art of Courage, opens at the Roloff Beny Gallery (for the Institute of Contemporary Culture) in Toronto on Friday, February 17.** This is an exhibit of works by 24 of Canada's leading visual artists (all women!) dedicated to the thousands of Canadian women diagnosed with breast cancer every year. Continues through May 22, 1995 and then will travel to several venues across Canada over the next three years.

♦ **Environmental Pollution and Breast Cancer, May 13, 1995** is a one-day forum to be held in Kingston, Ontario. More information in our next newsletter, or call us at The WEED office 416-516-2600 or organizer Janet Collins in Kingston at 613-531-8201.

♦ **National Pesticide-Free Week** (see page 9).

WNH&E: YOUR DONATIONS WELCOME!

Yes, this newsletter is free, but we'd like to sustain the work of the Women's Network on Health & the Environment. Your donations are most welcome, and are even tax creditable if you make your cheque payable to **The WEED Foundation, 736 Bathurst Street, Toronto ON M5S 2R4.** Please note at the bottom your cheque that it's for WNH&E. Many thanks!

FILM UPDATE

Research is well under way for the breast cancer/environment film being produced under the auspices of The WEED Foundation. Director Francine Zuckerman has already visited health and environmental activists in Boston and New York as well as a number of women in Ontario and Quebec. Thanks to excellent fundraising work by Francine, Martha Butterfield, the film's producer, Cathy Ward, WEED Board member (who is also raising money for WNH&E) and

Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, this project is off the ground! More funds are needed, however, so please consider a generous donation. All contributions to The WEED Foundation for the film are tax deductible. Letters of support from groups are most welcome too.

The aim is to have this much-needed film 'in the can' by summertime, and on its way to the UN's 'Fourth Women's Congress, slated for Beijing in September.

For more information, call Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg at (416) 960-4944.

OUR HEALTH DEPENDS ON MORE THAN OUR LIFESTYLE

By Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg

This article appeared in the *Toronto Star*, December 21, 1994

There is a prevailing understanding that all you have to do is live a healthy lifestyle and you will be healthy all your life.

If you eat vegetables, don't smoke, exercise and reduce stress, no doubt you will reduce the risk of heart attacks, strokes and cancer, but this only accounts for roughly half of the equation.

The other half is largely environmental and, therefore, political, requiring major changes. The two must go together.

Today, one in three people will get cancer and one in four will die from it. For women, more than 40 percent of these are cancers of the female reproductive organs; one in eight will get breast cancer, up from one in 20 a few decades ago.

In men, problems include rapidly declining sperm counts, increases in testicular cancer, undescended testes and smaller penises, as well as other immune deficiency and endocrine-disruption conditions.

These problems mirror a growing trend of environmental contamination by synthetic chemicals. For example, the chemical industry produces about 40 million tonnes of chlorine annually, much of it for industrial organochlorines.

The toxicity of these widely used chemicals makes them potent pesticides, their fat solubility makes them good cleaners, their bleaching ability makes them useful in the paper industry, and their stability makes them suitable for producing strong, durable plastics.

They include common toxins like dioxin, DDT, PCBs and CFCs. Deadly in trace amounts, these toxins are particularly

dangerous to humans and animals.

They can cause, among other things, hormonal disruptions, infertility, birth defects, impaired development, behavioral changes and cancer.

Women exposed to high levels of organochlorines and other synthetic chemicals have significantly higher levels of breast cancer.

These include women working in factories that produce solvents and pesticides, women chemists, women living near hazardous waste sites and even professional golfers exposed to lawn pesticides.

Those who maintain that cancer is largely an environmental disease and therefore preventable, promote strategies that keep people from getting cancer in the first place.

However, toxic prevention still is considered mainly a hypothetical concept by most cancer researchers. In fact, many governments, as well as industry, physicians, scientists, pharmaceutical corporations, etc., declare that there is not yet adequate scientific proof about environmental relationships to disease.

Instead, they largely focus their research on screening, testing and treatment, procedures that follow the onset of the already existing disease.

Most cancer agencies rarely mention carcinogens (other than tobacco) but promote the lifestyle approach as the key to prevention, the implication being that if people behave accordingly and still get cancer then it is somehow their fault.

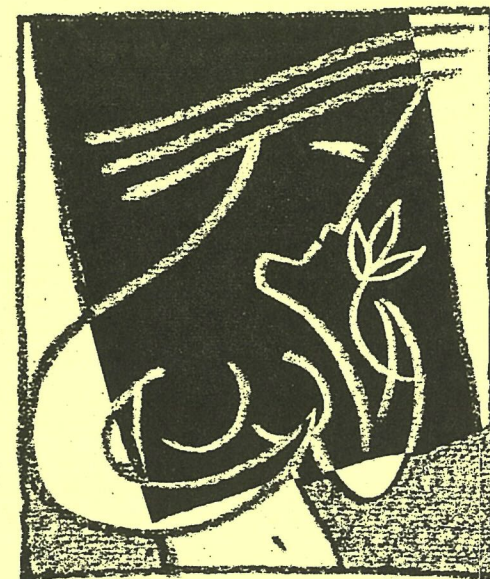
However, the situation is beginning to change as a result of public pressure in both the U.S. and Canada.

As evidence increasingly indicates environmental/health links to the health of the Earth that sustains us, the public is calling for toxic prevention research and for policies that respond to "zero discharge" of all persistent toxic chemicals.

The public is endorsing safe, efficient, practical alternatives to dangerous technologies currently proclaimed as necessary by those maintaining the status quo. Citizens see education as the key to creating the political pressure necessary to stop polluters and their protectors in governments, industry, academia and other institutions.

A safe and healthy planet will promote healthy life on it.

The more media, the better! Let's all write letters/articles like this one by Dorothy.



QUOTABLE QUOTES

Excerpts from Joan D'Argo's speech called **The Politics of Risk Assessment** to "A Day of Testimony" Boston, October 28, 1994.

◆ When your friends say you are one in a million, they are probably paying you a compliment. When a risk assessor says it, it probably means you are going to die. Inevitably, any risk assessment includes defining some "acceptable" level of harm, typically a cancer risk of one in a million, although cancer risks of one in one hundred thousand and less are not unusual. {Editor's note: It always astounds us that statistics for cancer are now one in three. Who's kidding whom with this one in a million stuff? But we as a society buy it all the time: It's the price of progress, eh?}

◆ Consider this: Currently, there are approximately 70,000 different chemicals that are used by industry on a daily basis, with about a thousand new chemicals being added on an annual basis. According to the National Toxicology Program, a preliminary assessment of the combined effects of just 25 common contaminants found in our drinking water would require 33 million experiments at a cost of about \$3 trillion. It's no surprise then that of the 70,000 chemicals currently used, less than 2 percent of them have undergone even basic toxicity tests.

◆ There is a fortune to be made in the chemical industry. There is a fortune to be made in the cancer industry as well. There are families all over America beginning to discover that their mothers, their aunts, their sisters, their daughters have unusually high rates of breast cancer, or the children in their neighborhoods know that the causes are not "natural". There is no one who could convince those families that risk assessments or cost-benefit analysis could make corporate profit more important than life itself. It's time our legislators and industries understood that too. This is called justice.

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Thank you to all who contributed to the issue, especially the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Energy, and Bev Thorpe!

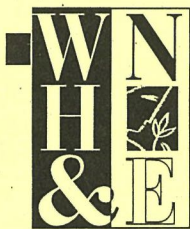
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