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Idaho Common Sense™



Craig L. Bosley, MD

Politically correct bad science

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The accuracy of environmental science research is critical because decrees by the United States impact the world, along with the consequences of that science. So, shouldn't we question environmental science? And, if that science is solid, shouldn't questioning be welcomed, rather than feared?

One of the problems with environmental science is that it can become politically influenced; leading the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and international organizations to conclusions and rulings with too little questioning.

Moreover, the likelihood of reversing an erroneous EPA ruling is slim because hell can no longer freeze over now that global warming is "fact."

But this discussion is not about global warming. No, this is about something that happened in 1972, following decades of questionable science. The world was saved when the EPA banned the chemical DDT. Science triumphed over profit. Or, did political correctness triumph over science?

Just a decade before DDT was banned, the National Academy of Science said, "To only a few chemicals does man owe as great a debt as to DDT." Its use had prevented over 500 million deaths from malaria. And conveniently, the United States and most of the industrialized nations of the world did not ban DDT until they had eliminated malaria in their own countries.

What happened following the EPA ruling? Most public and private donors to Third World countries followed suit, no longer funding DDT

use and effectively ending its use in most of these countries.

And the cost to stop using DDT? Only 50,000,000 lives. What a great investment for the health of the world, especially since no American or European lives were lost. We can sleep well knowing we rid the world of DDT — and millions of children.

Guess what? The science was bad. The science was full of half-truths. The science was politically motivated. And millions died. And millions are still dying—over 2,000,000 every year.

Why was DDT banned? Was it science or was it politics? In the Oct. 5, 1969, *Seattle Times*, Charles Wurster, a senior scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund, the activist group behind the ban on DDT, summed it up nicely saying, "If the environmentalists win on DDT, they will achieve a level of authority they have never had before. In a sense, much more is at stake than DDT." Impartial scientist or biased activist?

DDT is not responsible for many of the evils claimed. Of DDT and breast cancer in humans? Research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1997 stated that the authors found "no evidence that exposure to DDT and (its metabolite) DDE increases the risk of breast cancer."

And what about DDT and the thinning of egg shells of birds of prey, especially eagles? In 1968, Joseph J. Hickey and Daniel W. Anderson claimed "increased eggshell fragility" in birds of prey was caused by DDT. Years later they admitted the egg extracts they studied had little or no DDT and they were now pursuing other chemicals as the cause.

What happened? What went wrong? What is still going wrong? The failure of the science was that it set out to prove DDT was the problem; starting with the desired conclusion and then finding only the data that supported it. Bad science. Biased science. Politically motivated science.

More than 20 years later, in 2006, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that "after 50 million preventable deaths, the World Health Organization (WHO) reversed course and endorsed widespread use of the insecticide DDT to combat malaria." The WHO stated, "There's no evidence that spraying DDT in the amounts needed to kill mosquitoes imperils crops, animals, or human health."

Sadly, this was a short-lived victory. Because of well-placed lobbyists, the WHO quietly did an about face, continuing to promote much more expensive, and much less effective, insecticide-treated nets manufactured by those well-placed lobbyists. DDT, tremendously effective and much less expensive, still mostly sits on the sidelines.

Also ignoring the evidence, the Pesticide Action Network North America in San Francisco still opposes DDT use, claiming it "could" cause premature births and developmental delays in children. I suggest the most severe developmental delay is death from malaria. But that's just my opinion.

Dr. Craig Bosley is an emergency physician practicing in Pocatello, Idaho. His column appears in the *Idaho State Journal* each Monday. If you would like to contact him directly, you can email him at craig@craigbosley.com. His columns are available at www.craigbosley.com and podcasts of his columns are available at www.craigbosley.com/podcast.

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