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New Zealand. It included the following:

“Some farming districts in New Zealand had higher densities of dioxin-containing 2,4,5-T aerially sprayed upon them than the totals attributable to Agent Orange (50:50 2,4,5-T/2,4-D) in Vietnam. This was done mainly in springtime. Aerial drift into human dwellings in these sparsely populated areas, as well as into local towns, was unavoidable, given the lax methods of spraying. Drinking water collected on roofs could, as we pointed out in 1971, contain dangerous doses of dioxin.”

Dr Mann and Professor Elliott pressed for creation of a mandatory system to report birth defects accurately. ‘A decade after this controversy began, statistics of some reliability were being gathered. One of us – Elliott – discovered that the birth defect rates across Northland were correlated with the 2,4,5-T spray densities from one coast to the other. The potential for harm of aerial spraying in New Zealand was always emphatically denied by the Health Dept and their buddies the Agricultural Chemicals Board whose dogged mantra intoned ‘no scientific evidence from anywhere in the world has yet been presented to the Board to support the contention that 2,4,5-T has adverse effects on human reproduction’.

Although Northland District Health Board says its goal is to reduce the incidence of cancer through primary prevention, the Northland Cancer Control Strategic Action Plan 2006-2011 makes no mention of environmental contaminants.

It took 18 years of sporadic strife to shut down the last 2,4,5-T factory.”

The replacement herbicide has, so far, escaped comparable scrutiny, he warns.

Canadian conservationist David Suzuki says public places are coated with toxic chemicals and exposure to them can damage health. He quotes a 2003 report published by the Ontario college of Family Physicians that showed consistent links to serious illnesses, such as cancer, reproductive problems and neurological diseases associated with chronic pesticide exposure.

Suzuki points out that children are more vulnerable to the health effects of pesticide exposure because their young bodies are still developing.

“Uber-perfect lawns and sterilised flower gardens are not just passé, they’re making us – and our children and pets – sick. It’s common sense to get rid of these unnecessary toxins,” he says.

Australian is considering phasing out dioxin. Cornell University reports that two studies found a small increase in cancer risk among people exposed to pesticides, including dioxin but said in both studies the small number of cases and the many chemicals that were involved made it difficult to determine if dioxin had a role in causing the cancer. They concluded that dioxin’s effect on the pancreas should be studied further.

There is momentum building in Canada to make that country free of lawn and garden pesticides.