Train Stops Manufacture of Heptachlor/Chlordane, Cites Imminent Cancer Risk

[EPA press release - July 30, 1975]

Citing an imminent human cancer hazard, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Russell E. Train today ordered an end to the manufacture of the pesticides heptachlor and chlordane for most household and agricultural uses.

Heptachlor and chlordane are now in widespread use for home, lawn and garden pest control. Their major agricultural use is on corn crops. Today's decision would allow continued production for termite control by ground insertion and the dipping of roots and tops of non-food plants.

Train said that since his cancellation notice on November 18, 1974, which questioned the safety of heptachlor and chlordane and set in motion extensive public hearings on the issue, new evidence has been received "which confirms and heightens the human cancer hazard posed by these pesticides."

"I have found that these compounds cause cancer in laboratory animals and that laboratory tests are reliable indications of the human cancer hazard," Train said. "In addition, although any single component of human exposure--such as the intake through poultry--may not appear to be significant, it alone poses a cancer hazard to certain of the more susceptible individuals and together with the several other components of human exposure presents a serious human cancer threat. This threat is made even more alarming by evidence that human exposure begins in the mother's womb and continues without interruption throughout life. In addition, because these chemicals are ubiquitous, the major sources of human exposure are largely unavoidable by individual action."

Train cited new cancer evidence including:

- New human tissue studies have been concluded which found heptachlor epoxide in 97.71 percent and oxychlordane in 98.35 percent of the people sampled.

- New evidence from 1973 test animal feeding studies and pathological analysis recently received showing that the chemicals caused significant numbers of cancers in test animals.

- Additional expert pathological reviews of 1959 and 1965 test animal feeding studies which strengthen previous findings of carcinogenicity.

- More than 38 million pounds of heptachlor and chlordane are likely to be released into the environment during the estimated 18 months it may take to complete the
cancellation hearings now underway.

Train's "notice of intent to suspend" issued today will stop the manufacture and sale of these chemicals almost immediately, unless an expedited hearing is requested by manufacturers or formulators of the product. Velsicol Chemical Corp. is the sole U.S. manufacturer of the active ingredients. There are several hundred "formulators" who formulate, package and sell these chemicals for various purposes under various brand names.

The suspension hearing, if requested within 5 days from the date affected registrants receive the suspension notice, is limited by regulation to 40 hearing days in duration. The Administrator may grant an extra 10 days if necessary. The hearing examiner's recommendations are due within the 10 days following completion of the hearing, and the Administrator's final decision is required to follow within 7 days. This means the entire suspension process could be completed by the end of this year.

Train pointed out that a number of other pesticides registered with EPA can be substituted for the same general uses as heptachlor and chlordane.

Train listed eight findings which led to his decision to suspend:

- Virtually every person in the United States has residues of heptachlor epoxide and oxychlordane--the principal metabolites of heptachlor and chlordane--in his body tissues.

- Data from human stillborn monitoring studies show that heptachlor epoxide crosses the placental barrier and enters the human fetus.

- Human mothers' milk sampled during 1975 contains quantifiable residues of heptachlor epoxide and oxychlordane.

- The Food and Drug Administration's market basked survey, for the most recent reporting period of FY 1974, reports measurable amounts of heptachlor, heptachlor epoxide or chlordane found in composite samples of 73 percent of all dairy products and 77 percent of all meat, fish, and poultry samples.

- More than 7,500,000 pounds of the active ingredient chlordane were used for home, lawn and garden purposes in 1974. Many of these applications are carried out by individual homeowners who may expose themselves, their family members and their neighbors by direct contact with the skin, by inhalation, by contamination of clothing and by ingestion.

- Heptachlor and chlordane have been shown to be carcinogenic in mouse and rat experiments.

- More than 38 million pounds of heptachlor and chlordane would be released into the environment during the next 18 months required for the ongoing cancellation proceedings.

- Over 70 percent of the agricultural use of these chemicals is on corn crops. According to the USDA, the maximum estimated loss to corn production from cancellation of heptachlor/chlordane and aldrin/dieldrin, taking into account numerous registered alternative pesticides, would be only 0.4 percent of the nation's 1973 total corn production. The USDA forecast of a bumper corn crop for 1975 demonstrates that
even for the current crop year total losses would not exceed approximately 0.4 percent. In addition, Train said, "Although we are also sensitive to the needs of homeowners who use chlordane, there is a wide selection of registered alternative pesticides to replace the numerous uses in and around the home."

Train said continued use of stocks of EPA registered pesticides containing heptachlor or chlordane, formulated prior to today's decision, will be permitted. He said existing stocks should be relatively small and could not be realistically retrieved.