

Statement on the DDT Problem -- presented to the House
Agriculture Committee, State of Minnesota, March 24, 1969.

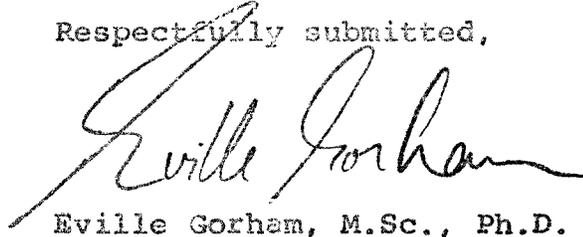
DDT and other "hard" pesticides (chlorinated hydrocarbons) have a high degree of toxicity for both lower and higher animals, including man, a very slow rate of breakdown in nature, a tendency to concentrate to high levels along food-chains, and -- because of indiscriminate spraying -- a world-wide distribution. Moreover, even after 20 years of use we still have much to learn about such pesticides, as illustrated by the fact that only recently has DDT been shown to simulate certain reproductive hormones and to induce the formation of liver enzymes which break down steroid hormones in the body. Because of our lack of knowledge, we are at present unable to predict the likely effects of a low-level lifetime dose of hard pesticides, and it is our own children and grandchildren who are the test generation for an uncontrolled experiment begun in ignorance and continued largely owing to public and official apathy.

It is my belief, as a professional ecologist who has worked for 20 years in the field of environmental pollution, that we should presently ban the use of hard pesticides such as DDT; so that they will be taken out of use and cease to contaminate further our already damaged environment. I recognize that there may be special cases where "hard" pesticides could provide a purely temporary method of choice for limited use in the absence of better pest controls. Therefore, once a ban is imposed, study should be initiated to determine whether a licensing bureau staffed by competent professionals could be set up to prescribe the use of hard pesticides in the way that doctors prescribe drugs and medicines, for strictly limited use under thoroughly controlled and policed conditions. Establishment of such a bureau would preclude sale to the public of hard pesticides, which at present are commonly dispensed by persons with little or no technical understanding and used by persons unwilling to pay due regard to instructions printed on the label of the container.

Development of such a licensing bureau would allow the state government, at a later time, to place under its control the dispensing of shorter-lived but even more toxic pesticides of other kinds which are presently available over the counter to the general public.

It may be argued that the use of DDT for programs such as the control of Dutch elm disease should continue, because such use is well controlled and presents much less of a hazard than the often uncontrolled and uneducated use of hard pesticides by householders, gardeners, and farmers. However, if conservation departments, mosquito control units and park boards continue to use hard pesticides, the average citizen will generally believe that his own local use can scarcely present any problem; and so I believe it is up to municipal, state and federal authorities to provide a lead for the public at large by banning the use of DDT and other hard pesticides at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eville Gorham". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Eville Gorham, M.Sc., Ph.D.