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From pestfacts.org

Pest Control Products in America - How Safe?

Many Americans don't give a second thought to a kitchen cupboard free from cockroaches, a front lawn minus weeds, a nearby pond teeming with fish. Such benefits - all part of a clean, healthy living environment - are taken for granted. They're as American as mom and apple pie.

Without the use of specialty pesticides, however, the story would be radically different. Disease-infested trees? Scarce shade. Vegetation-choked waterways? Fish that don't flourish. Roach-infested kitchens? Food in short supply.

Specialty pesticides rid homes and workplaces of annoying and damaging insects, noxious weeds and plant diseases. Like antibiotics, that work selectively to rid the human body of only undesirable bacteria and germs, specialty pesticides target dangerous and damaging pests and keep them in check.

Properly used, specialty pesticides play a big role in helping this nation maintain one of the highest standards of living in the world. However, the road isn't always smooth. Specialty pesticides are under fire from several sectors, both public and private, even though their value to society is proven.

While risks must be considered, the benefits of specialty pesticides can't be denied. Any medicine used properly and according to label instructions can do enormous good. Used improperly or abused, it can become a poison. The dose makes the poison. The tests that specialty pesticides undergo during the registration process are similar to those for pharmaceuticals. But, in most cases, specialty pesticides must undergo even more tests to prove they can interact with the environment, as well as humans, without undue risk.

Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop encourages the public to recognize the difference between real risk and hypothetical risk: "The risk, for example, of being killed by an automobile (1 in 6,000) is much greater than any hypothetical risk of a pesticide. Yet that doesn't keep us off the road, either as passengers or as pedestrians."

Koop explains that by focusing on a hypothetical risk, like that from pesticides, people experience increased anxiety levels. In addition they often neglect other areas - such as smoking, alcohol consumption, diet and exercise - which can be more readily and legitimately managed, with greater effect.

The lesson is simple: Everything has risks, but risks must be weighed against benefits. Americans use potentially toxic products - from cleansers to gasoline - every day. Used properly, they serve their purpose and improve our quality of life. Specialty pesticides do the same.