

To the Editor

Re: “Fateful Voice of a Generation Still Drowns Out Real Science” by John Tierney Findings, Science Times, June 5, 2007).

Being the Chair of the Health Committee of the Pine River Superfund Task Force, the U.S. EPA community advisory group for Superfund sites in the middle of Michigan, I was quite disappointed in the dual bias implicit in Mr. Tierney’s attack on the work of Rachel Carson and his repetition of the self-serving claims of petrochemical lobbyists regarding DDT. The author ignores the evidence presented in numerous peer reviewed epidemiological studies of the negative human health impacts of DDT, especially on fetuses and infants.

While DDT use can reduce malarial mosquito populations, its use also correlates with a host of developmental problems in children. As Walter Rogan wrote in “The Lancet,” such use “might cause preterm birth and early weaning, abrogating the benefit of reducing infant mortality from malaria.” Likewise, in a recent study funded by the National Institutes of Health, the authors warned, “Countries considering the use of DDT should weigh its benefit in eradicating malaria against the negative associations . . . [with] human neurodevelopment.” Other studies have found associations of DDT use with outcomes ranging from altered child sexual development and thyroid problems.

The story that Mr. Tierney should have reported related to DDT is the irresponsible campaign to sacrifice public health protection on the twin altars of economic self-interest and free market ideology. Apparently still haunted by the ghost of Rachel Carson, special interests groups with deceptive names, such as Africa Fighting Malaria, distort Ms. Carson’s record of caution and moderation, practicing the very emotionality and lack of empiricism of which they accuse her. That Mr. Tierney would give their bias uncritical exposure is a disservice to the work of generations of health scientists struggling against the twin infant scourges of malaria and organochlorine exposure.

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