



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on June 6, 2013

## DDT Ban Breeds Death

Worldwide more than 2,700 people will die today because of a bureaucratic regulation instituted during the Nixon administration in 1972. The same number died yesterday and will again tomorrow, in an ever-growing tally of victims of that catastrophic policy. The regulation imposed by Nixon's newly formed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned DDT, an insecticide that had until then saved the lives of countless U.S. citizens. Leaders in Europe and the United Nations followed suit in a frenzy of misguided environmental zeal and bloodthirsty population control fervor.



"European nations and the United States used insecticides to rid themselves of disease and then pulled up the ladder, denying Africans, Asians and Latin Americans the benefits of those same insecticides," explain Dr. Donald Roberts and Richard Tren in their 2010 exposé, [The Excellent Powder: DDT's Political and Scientific History](#). Wealthy nations merit this accusation because before the advent of DDT, parasitic diseases like malaria, typhus, and yellow fever had plagued their own shores for centuries. These infections are known as vector-borne diseases because insects (i.e., vectors) carry disease-causing parasites from person to person.

When DDT first came into use as a pesticide, many called it miraculous, which was hardly an exaggeration considered in perspective. Until then, yellow fever claimed so many lives it was known in the United States as the "Scourge of the South." The French abandoned efforts in the 1880s to construct the Panama Canal because malaria killed so many workers. Typhus, the disease that took the life of diarist Anne Frank, was once feared as deadlier than any weapon of war in Europe. Yet in a period of three weeks in 1943, DDT wiped out one of history's deadliest typhus outbreaks in Naples, Italy. In fact DDT's effectiveness has made all these disease names as antiquated to our ears as scurvy and the plague.

Not so for unfortunates in developing countries. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), globally malaria kills approximately one million people every year, more than any other parasitic infection. Most victims are young children in sub-Saharan Africa. Names like typhus, yellow fever, leishmaniasis, dengue fever, and bancroftian filariasis are likewise too familiar to hundreds of thousands of those affected in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

DDT's life-saving properties are lost to them because the EPA's 1972 ban sparked a global censure of the pesticide. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) now classifies it as one of 12 "Persistent Organic Pollutants" (POPs), otherwise known as "The Dirty Dozen." UNEP claims DDT is a danger to humans and the environment. Yet a closer look at the case reveals a terrifying reality: saving lives isn't what policymakers are after.

"My chief quarrel with DDT in hindsight is that it has greatly added to the population problem," complained Alexander King, co-founder of the Club of Rome, a global think-tank dedicated to population



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reduction. In his 1968 best-selling book *The Population Bomb*, Malthusian Paul Ehrlich warned that “every life saved this year in a poor country diminishes the quality of life for subsequent generations,” arguing against DDT as “exported death control.” Sierra Club Director Michael McCloskey explained his organization’s opposition to DDT in 1971, saying, “By using DDT, we reduce mortality rates in underdeveloped countries without the consideration of how to support the increase in populations.”

As we shall see, it was this philosophy that led to the ban and continues to keep DDT blacklisted. But first it is necessary to take a glimpse at the pre-DDT world.

### **The Rise and Fall of DDT**

When University of Strasbourg graduate student Othmar Zeidler combined chloral hydrate with chlorobenzene in the presence of a sulfuric acid catalyst, he was not out to save millions of lives. The year was 1874, and Zeidler just wanted to meet requirements of his thesis by producing a new molecule: dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, or DDT. His discovery sat on the shelf for the next 65 years. It was in 1939 that DDT’s life-saving properties came to light, 28 years after Zeidler’s death. Paul Mueller, a researcher with the Swiss chemical company J.R. Geigy, was not out to reduce suffering and deaths of millions either. He simply wanted to kill moths that infest stored clothing. He discovered DDT did so and much more.

At that time the Colorado potato beetle threatened Switzerland’s food supply. DDT quickly brought the blight to an end. Further testing by the Swiss government showed DDT to be an extremely effective broad-spectrum pesticide that was chemically stable, cheap to produce, and harmless to mammals. British and American forces in World War II used DDT to wipe out deadly typhus epidemics so common in war-torn areas, a feat never accomplished before in history. The Allies went on to quell lice and bedbug infestations in army barracks and refugee camps and to stamp out malaria epidemics in various theaters of war. In fact, before DDT, malaria was such a problem for General MacArthur’s troops in the Pacific that he declared only one-third were truly fit for combat. “If the problem were to persist,” said the general, “the war would be a very long conflict.”

DDT turned the tide. In a 1944 radio address, Winston Churchill praised the “excellent DDT powder” as “astonishing” and promised to use it on a “great scale” in saving millions of lives from vector-borne diseases. Discovery of the chemical’s life-saving properties earned Mueller the 1948 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine.

DDT’s popularity soared in the United States. It became a hot item for farmers since the “excellent powder” was cheap and effective in their constant combat against crop-destroying insects. But public health witnessed the most dramatic effects. When U.S. home-spraying operations commenced in 1947, there were 15,000 cases of malaria in the Southeast. By 1950, only 2,000 cases were reported, and in 1951, officials considered malaria eradicated.

Based on these astonishing results, the World Health Organization (WHO), established by the UN in 1948, heavily promoted DDT-based malaria eradication programs in the 1950s and 1960s. Country after country witnessed malaria deaths and suffering drop by orders of magnitude:

- In Zanzibar, DDT spraying commenced in 1958 when malaria plagued 70 percent of the population. Six years later, frequency had dropped to 5 percent. After the DDT ban, case prevalence rose to between 50 and 60 percent.
- Malaria cases in Venezuela numbered 817,115 in 1943 when DDT entered the scene, but health authorities reported only 800 in 1958.



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- In the 1950s, annual malaria cases in Nepal totaled two million, with a 10 percent mortality rate. Life expectancy was only 28 years. By 1968, there were 2,468 cases, and life expectancy reached 42.3 years in 1970. Officials credited DDT alone.
- Peru had practically eradicated malaria using DDT, but since spraying was halted there in the 1980s, malaria is once again a major public health issue.
- A 1959 pilot study conducted in Uganda reported malaria case prevalence in a high-risk area of 22.7 percent dropping to just 0.5 percent in 10 months. In surrounding variable-risk areas the rate declined from 12.5 percent to zero.
- Taiwan reduced its number of cases from more than one million in 1945 to nine in 1969. Soon thereafter officials reported the disease eradicated from the island, and it remains so today.
- The population of India in 1947 was 344 million, of which a mind-bending 21.8 percent was infected with malaria. Deaths reported that year topped 800,000. In 1965, outbreaks had dropped 99 percent and no deaths occurred. Today India has the world's only high-capacity DDT production facility and continues to enjoy extremely low rates of insect-borne disease. (Interestingly, despite environmentalist claims that DDT is a human carcinogen, WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer reports total rates of cancer in India are less than half those in the United States.)

The National Academy of Sciences concluded in 1965 that "in a little more than two decades, DDT has prevented 500 million [human] deaths that would otherwise have been inevitable." WHO issued a statement in 1969: "DDT has been the main agent in eradicating malaria ... and [has] saved at least 2 billion people in the world without causing the loss of a single life by poisoning from DDT alone." It went on to state, "It is so safe that no symptoms have been observed among the spraymen or among the inhabitants of the spray areas which numbered 130,000 and 535 million (respectively) at the peak of the campaign."

However, it was also in 1969 at WHO's executive board meeting that officials voiced concern about environmental agitation against DDT in North America and parts of Europe. They worried that resulting higher prices and decreased availability would "place severe restrictions on the use of DDT," endangering lives in developing countries.

The problem was that once infectious diseases were conquered in developed countries, people there lost fear of them and quickly forgot the danger. Roberts and Tren point out five of the 11 Nobel Prizes awarded between 1939 and 1952 "went to scientists who had made significant advances in controlling disease. By 1960, the disease profile of the United States had changed radically." At that point, the use of DDT along with advances in technology, development of antibiotics and vaccines, and improvements in living conditions and hygiene freed Americans from the tyranny of insect-borne disease. In that freedom public opinion became susceptible to the growing environmental movement and its propaganda campaign pitting progress against nature.

## Silent Spring

Al Gore credits Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* with jump-starting the movement. Indeed, publishers of the 40th anniversary edition call it "The Cornerstone of Modern Environmentalism." *Silent Spring* provided a crisis necessary to gain media and public attention — a fictional village transformed by DDT from a thriving utopia into a barren wasteland void of birdsong. The book was a popular hit, but critics within the scientific community accused Carson, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), of ignoring science and using exaggerated hype and unsubstantiated sources to promote



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her political agenda.

One critic was J. Gordon Edwards, Ph.D., of San Jose State University, who, as a World War II soldier, witnessed firsthand DDT's remarkable effectiveness during the 1943 Naples typhus epidemic. The experience inspired his career in entomology (study of insects). Edwards was a member of the Audubon Society and the California Academy of Sciences. The Sierra Club published his 1960 book, *A Climber's Guide to Glacier National Park*.

Edwards eagerly grabbed a copy of *Silent Spring* hot off the press in 1962. His excitement quickly turned to disappointment. In the Fall 2004 issue of the *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*, he recalled that Carson's book is riddled with fallacies and deceit. As he read,

the feeling grew in my mind that Rachel Carson was really playing loose with the facts and was also deliberately wording many sentences in such a way as to make them imply certain things without actually saying them. She was carefully omitting everything that failed to support her thesis that pesticides were *bad*, that industry was *bad*, and that any scientists who did not support her views were *bad*.

He noted duplicity even in her Dedication to Albert Schweitzer, whom she quoted: "Man has lost his capacity to see and forestall. He will end by destroying the earth." She conveniently ignored a statement in Schweitzer's autobiography: "How much labor and waste of time these wicked insects do cause us ... but a ray of hope, in the use of DDT, is now held out to us."

Thus began Edwards' life-long campaign to defend DDT and oppose unwarranted environmental regulations. He would eat a tablespoon of the powder during public lectures to show its non-toxicity. His last work, *DDT: A Case Study in Scientific Fraud*, was published in 2004 shortly after his death at age 84 while climbing Divide Mountain with his wife, Alice.

Despite his efforts, *Silent Spring* entrenched its errors in popular opinion and public policies. Three of Carson's most long-lived and damaging myths are:

- *DDT kills robins.* Bad choice. The United States used DDT liberally beginning in the late 1940s, with peak usage in 1959. According to the Audubon Society, robin populations increased by a factor of 12, and birds in general increased fourfold during that time. Ironically, the only logical reason for this boon was the destruction of mites and mosquitoes that spread disease among birds, particularly in swampy areas.
- *DDT is both toxic to humans and a human carcinogen.* The International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies various agents based on carcinogenicity. The highest ranking agents include such common items as birth control pills, tanning beds, chimney soot, and smoking. DDT is classed with pickled vegetables and coconut oil. The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry issued a Toxicological Profile for DDT in 2002 which concluded: "Relative risk of death, and specifically of death due to any cancer, was not significantly elevated in the high serum DDT tertile groups. No consistent positive trend in risk of cancer mortality relative to serum DDT was observed."
- *DDT persists in the environment for years and accumulates and concentrates in the food chain.* DDT actually breaks down more rapidly than other insecticides, many of which are proven toxins to humans and the environment. The crude instruments used to measure pesticide stability in Carson's day lumped all these together, resulting in guilt by association. By 1969, the FWS could report that DDT breaks down more quickly than some insecticides, based on tests conducted at its Pesticide Field Station in Gulf Breeze, Florida.



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Environmentalists ignored such evidence and exploited these myths that had engrained themselves in popular opinion through the 1960s. The movement gained new momentum in 1970 when the journal *Science* published a study by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) chemist Joel Bitman and two colleagues demonstrating that DDT in birds' diets causes eggshell thinning. The scientific community demanded a retrial when it discovered Bitman had significantly reduced calcium in the diets of the test birds, though calcium is necessary for healthy eggshells. Bitman repeated the study with adequate dietary calcium, and the shells were not thinned at all. However, *Science* refused to publish the corrected research! Edwards reported that when challenged, editor Philip Abelson said his journal "would never publish anything that was not antagonistic toward DDT."

### **The Hearing That Wasn't Heard**

Spurred by complaints based on Carson's screed and resulting anti-DDT propaganda from the ultra-left Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and its allies, the EPA called a hearing on DDT. After considering testimony of 125 witnesses, EPA judge Edmund Sweeney issued his verdict in April, 1972. He supported DDT unequivocally, stating it is not carcinogenic and that its benefits far outweigh any risks. Sweeney noted the "present need for continued use" of the excellent powder and remarked that evidence showed potential replacement pesticides would "in many cases have more deleterious effects than the harm allegedly caused by DDT."

However, two months later, ignoring his own agency's ruling and advice, EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus single-handedly outlawed almost all use of DDT. He made the unscientific assertion that it poses "unacceptable risk to the environment and potential harm to human health." He had not bothered to attend a single day of the seven-month hearing and, according to aides, had not read any transcripts. Critics quip that his decision shot him to the top of an infamous list: Hitler, 20.9 million deaths; Stalin, 61.9 million deaths; Mao Tse-Tung, 77 million deaths; Ruckelshaus, estimates range from 100 million to more than the competition combined.

It was a great victory for environmentalists. Prior to the hearing, senior EDF scientist Charles Wurster told the *Seattle Times*, "If the environmentalists win on DDT, they will achieve a level of authority they have never had before. In a sense, much more is at stake than DDT." He was right. Today, the EPA's website flippantly states of Ruckelshaus, "Though unpopular among certain segments of EPA's constituency, his decision did serve to enhance the activist image he sought to create for the agency, and without prohibitive political cost."

Ruckelshaus' naïve response to criticism that his decision would endanger lives was, "There's arrogance in the idea that everybody's going to do what we do. We're not making these decisions for the rest of the world, are we?" Was it possible he was unaware that DDT producers in the United States exported more than 60 percent of their product to worldwide malaria control programs?

Environmentalists next targeted DDT production and export. Industry producers had little incentive to fight for the inexpensive powder because they could make more money on higher-priced "alternatives" that were, ironically, toxic to humans and the environment. With little opposition and fueled by Ruckelshaus' decision, environmental groups sued to ban DDT export. In response, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the bureau responsible for coordinating foreign assistance, threatened "to stop foreign aid to any country using it," relate Gerald and Natalie Sirkin in their 2005 special report *DDT, Fraud and Tragedy*. "Its threat spread Ruckelshaus' ban worldwide."

WHO and UNICEF, the two UN agencies responsible for malaria eradication programs, reacted by





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decentralizing DDT-based efforts, placing them in the hands of local USAID mission directors in underdeveloped countries without the means or infrastructure to continue them. According to Javed Siddiqi in his 1995 book *World Health and World Politics: The World Health Organization and the UN System*, “Many USAID mission directors were more interested in endorsing family-planning programmes, which they felt would address the growing problem of over-population.”

Malaria quickly regained its stranglehold in those countries, so in 1998, after two decades of failed decentralized control programs, WHO formed the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) initiative, partnering with various UN agencies, the World Bank, USAID, and others. Today RBM enlists the aid of more than 500 partners, and USAID alone donates \$90 million annually. The original goal of RBM was to halve the burden of malaria by 2010, and the main strategy was distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets (ITNs). Failing dismally, RBM has extended its deadline to 2015, when it envisions “a world free from the burden of malaria.” ITNs remain the primary strategy, and DDT remains largely ignored.

### **Population Control**

Today, insect-borne disease remains unchecked because radicals have succeeded in demonizing DDT with fabricated environmental concerns. In reality, they fear the “excellent powder” would cause a catastrophic population explosion.

Richard Nixon was an outspoken advocate of depopulation measures. As president one of his first messages to Congress, dated July 18, 1969, addressed “Problems of Population Growth.” In it he stated his commitment to limiting population and forming a comprehensive U.S. population policy. In 1970, he established the U.S. State Department’s Office of Population Affairs (now under the Department of Health and Human Services), dedicated to “reproductive health issues,” including sterilization and sex education. It is perhaps no coincidence that three years later the Supreme Court legalized abortion in every state in the nation.

There is also no coincidence that 1970 marked the year Nixon created the EPA and gave it regulatory control of pesticides. Until then, the USDA regulated DDT and had determined there were no adequate substitutes for agricultural use of the powder. However, as J.R. Kramer reported in *Science* magazine in 1969, Nixon’s political agenda included a pledge to ban most uses of DDT. The president fulfilled that promise two years later in EPA’s first major ruling.

Also in 1970, Nixon launched the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, chaired by John D. Rockefeller, III. The commission’s findings stressed the grave threat of overpopulation to U.S. security and the environment. Again in 1974, the president directed then-National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to undertake a study similar to that of the Rockefeller commission. Under the innocuous title “National Security Study Memorandum 200” (NSSM 200), Kissinger reported a “major risk of severe damage” to global economic, political, and ecological systems. NSSM 200 alleged that world population growth is “a current danger of the highest magnitude calling for urgent measures”:

It is of the utmost urgency that governments now recognize the facts and implications of population growth, determine the ultimate population sizes that make sense for their countries and start vigorous programs at once to achieve their desired goals.

By the time these findings were published, Gerald Ford was in the White House. He strongly endorsed NSSM 200 in 1975, calling on the United States to lead the world in combating population growth and authorizing the National Security Council to adopt NSSM 200 as its official population control policy. According to Stephen Mumford, president of the Center for Research on Population and Security,



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“Because of the bold nature of the suggested initiatives, the authors recommended that the report remain classified for 5 years in order to provide time to educate the American public as to the necessity of these initiatives. The NSSM 200 report actually remained classified for 14 years.”

This classified information, which cemented itself in U.S. foreign policy during that 14-year span, contains bold recommendations regarding sterilization, abortion, sex education, and food rationing. Chapter titles include “Creating Conditions Conducive to Fertility Decline” and “Concentration on Education and Indoctrination of the Rising Generation of Children Regarding the Desirability of Smaller Family Size.”

NSSM 200 warns that population growth in less-developed countries (LDC) threatens world food supplies, jeopardizes the availability of raw materials vital to the U.S. economy, and endangers U.S. national security by swelling the ranks in areas prone to violence and unrest. The policy states LDC population growth “absorbs large amounts of resources needed for *more productive investment* in development” and recommends “preferential treatment in allocation of funds” — i.e., foreign aid. (Emphasis added.) But Kissinger’s team cautioned, “In these sensitive relationships, however, it is important in style as well as substance to avoid the appearance of coercion.” In other words, it is okay to orchestrate genocide as long as you don’t look like you’re doing so.

## Genocide

Was DDT banned to intentionally kill millions? There is reason to believe promoting the spread of disease is merely one tactic in the global population control strategy carefully planned and carried out to this day by political leaders and opinion molders. NSSM 200, which became official U.S. policy in 1975, warned of dire consequences if rates of population growth in the developing world at the time were not checked by “famine, disease, or massive birth control.”

In 1991, famed oceanographer Jacques Cousteau told the *UNESCO Courier*:

Our society is turning toward more and more needless consumption. It is a vicious circle that I compare to cancer.... Should we eliminate suffering, diseases? The idea is beautiful, but perhaps not a benefit for the long term. We should not allow our dread of diseases to endanger the future of our species.

This is a terrible thing to say. *In order to stabilize world population, we must eliminate 350,000 people per day.* It is a horrible thing to say, but it’s just as bad not to say it. [Emphasis added.]

Also in 1991, the Club of Rome published a report, *The First Global Revolution*, in which it asserted, “The common enemy of humanity is Man.” It blamed mankind for “pollution, the threat of global warming, water shortages, famine and the like,” and concluded, “The real enemy, then, is humanity itself.”

Thanks to anti-DDT activists, deadly malaria now reigns supreme in countries that had made substantial strides toward eradication in the mid-20th century. With limited exceptions WHO, UNICEF, and USAID consider DDT a measure of last resort and refuse to promote it, instead funding ineffective insecticide treated nets or dead-end vaccine research while limiting funds to investigate alternative insecticides. The Stockholm Convention, which went into force in 2004, legally binds most UN-participant nations to “take actions to reduce or eliminate the production, use and/or release” of DDT. Meanwhile thousands die needlessly every day, and though Americans do not witness firsthand this overseas genocide, the resurgence of mosquito-borne West Nile Virus in the United States could soon demand a DDT renaissance.



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**Sidebar:** DDT: Mosquitoes' Not-so-toxic Foe

In 1902, Sir Ronald Ross merited the Nobel Prize for Medicine in discovering the connection between a particular genus of mosquito, *Anopheles*, and malaria, the most widespread and deadly of vector-borne diseases. The *Anopheles* mosquito bites a human infected with the *Plasmodium malariae* protozoa and carries the parasite to the next human it bites.

Mosquitoes are genetically programmed as to preferred hosts and preferred feeding times and places. Unlike *Anopheles*, some mosquitoes prefer non-human hosts, and others aren't so picky. For example, *Culex* and *Aedes* mosquitoes transmit West Nile Virus from birds to humans. However, *Anopheles* prefers human blood and prefers to feed in human dwellings. That is how malaria spreads so quickly and why, according to Roberts and Tren, DDT is ideal for eradicating it.

DDT is applied on the walls of houses in a process commonly known as indoor residual spraying (IRS). However, after spraying you won't find many dead mosquitoes on the floor. That is because toxicity is only one way DDT works. It is also an extremely effective repellent and irritant. More than 70 percent of mosquitoes flying into a treated house just turn around and fly back out. The others rest on a treated surface where they are irritated and leave the premises. Fewer than 10 percent remain long enough to absorb a lethal dose. Over time the genus dies out in an IRS-treated area, seldom because DDT killed it but because DDT deprived it of its main food source necessary for reproduction.

DDT's repellent and irritant properties are important to understand because of an enduring myth Rachel Carson spawned in *Silent Spring*. She alleged that mosquitoes quickly build resistance to DDT's toxic effects, negating its usefulness as an insecticide. Actually, DDT doesn't have to kill one mosquito to eradicate malaria. Mosquitoes that develop toxic resistance are just as repelled and irritated as ever. This can be deduced from two simple facts: Numbers of malaria deaths plummet when DDT is used; when it is stopped, malaria again becomes epidemic. Case closed.

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