

Why We Need To Make The Planet Organic

The global atmosphere knows no borders. Clouds of dust and chemicals drift across oceans from one continent to another. Pesticides banned for use by a nation can still cross its borders with the wind, blown in from other nations that allow their use.

Farm and forestland is degrading rapidly around the world due in large measure to decades of poisoning our ecosystems for a profit. The life that sustains this land and makes it more than just a pile of dirt is at risk from industrial "progress" and the chemical pollution that goes with it.

Residents of towns adjacent to agricultural areas are regularly exposed to airborne pesticides. Even office workers in Eureka walked through clouds of herbicide drift earlier this year when the



City sprayed sidewalks and parks to kill weeds.

Vital soil food webs are broken when pesticides kill bacteria, fungi, nematodes, protozoa, arthropods, earthworms, insects, amphibians, reptiles and mammals that call dirt "home." By reducing soil biodiversity so drastically, new space is made for pests, plants are weakened and an endless pesticide treadmill is activated.

GMO crops developed for resistance to certain pesticides have led to an addiction on those chemicals; narrowing soil biodiversity to such an extreme that the nation's very breadbasket is in danger.

The earth and its inhabitants need a break from this madness. Let's kick the chemical habit and make this the

Organic Planet!

the drift

The Drift is a publication of Californians for Alternatives to Toxics (CATs).

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Founded in 1982, CATs is a clearinghouse for information and action regarding pesticides and other toxic chemicals and to promote alternatives to their use.

CATs works to bring solutions to toxic conditions occurring in northern California, with actions that benefit people here and around the world.

CATs is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law – and very welcomed!

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THE drift

Newsletter of Californians for Alternatives to Toxics

Since 1982

"The human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery – not over nature but of ourselves"

- Rachel Carson

Eureka Stops Sprays – Switches To IVM

Heeding a call from CATs, the city of Eureka has stopped the outdoor application of herbicides and is planning an Integrated Vegetation Management program (IVM, see page 3) that could reduce or even eliminate use of toxic sprays.

Representatives of the city's Public Works Department will soon schedule meetings with CATs and Eureka's to begin the IVM process--which would be a triumph for rational weed control.

Herbicides used by the city lately contain the active ingredients triclopyr and glyphosate, commonly found in such products as Round-Up and Garlon--and known to be hazardous to humans, animals and non-target plants. They were used last spring during a typically rainy period, potentially tainting stormwater runoff.

While CATs has alerted citizens to the two herbicides sprayed last Spring, it also is investigating the full spectrum of pesticide use by the city and will publicize its findings.

Invisible Threat

The city is not a heavy user of chemicals, but when and where it sprays can surprise and concern citizens because there often is no public notice, warning signs or even proper safety equipment for city workers.

Members of CATs have reported various incidents in Eureka. One member was coated with a noxious drift from weed spraying when he rounded a downtown corner. Another witnessed a city employee applying herbicides--without signs or warnings--in an area used by children in a city park.

Yet Eureka doesn't have to look far to see how herbicide use can become unnecessary.



Danger To Animals

CATs members Bill Verick and Michelle Smith steer their dogs away from oversprayed Eureka landscaping.



How You Can Help These Critters! (see inside)



315 P Street Eureka, CA 95501

Return Service Requested

Happy Organic Holidays!

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Watch Your Step

Dead vegetation is the result of unselective and copious use of herbicides – as seen in this parking lot in Eureka's Old Town.

Don't Get Manic: Just Go Organic

With nearly two-thirds of Americans regularly purchasing organic food and natural products, the trailblazing annual Organic Planet Festival is riding the crest of a smart-shopping wave.

This increasing switch to organic, natural and local food, clothing, gardening and household supplies is a welcome response to the growing awareness that our planet is burdened with toxic and dangerous chemicals.

That was the good news and it deserved a party, CATs decided five years ago, when the Organic Planet Festival debuted on the Eureka waterfront. It's become a yearly party ever since, celebrated by thousands on the fourth Sunday of August.



Dr. Tyrone Hayes Explains Pesticide and Environmental Justice Issues

In 2009, it will be held on August 23rd--and CATs is gearing up for it already, especially considering how successful it was last summer. Then, more than 2,500 festival-goers, aided by a record 200 volunteers, 65 vendors and exhibitors and three

dozen underwriters enjoyed great music, educational workshops, tons of organic food and sheer outright fun.

Next summer's festival should feature the same popular attractions: the world's largest organic salad, a giant grocery give-away, a kids' village and petting zoo, lots of music --and, to discourage cars, a shuttle bus from Arcata and "valet parking" for bicycles.

YOU can add your ideas, too.

Now is the time to get involved. Become a

sponsor or underwriter, suggest ideas for workshops, volunteer your time.

Contact CATs at the address below or see www.organicplanetfestival.org for details throughout the year.



People Of All Ages Went Organic



Belting It Out By The Bay



Queen Ida Rocks The Festival

25 And Counting: CATs Carries On

By Patty Clary, Director

We've been quietly celebrating CATs' 25th anniversary, though it's origins go back further in time. That's because CATs has its roots in the early 1970s when people in 28 northern California counties started organizing to fight aerial spraying of herbicides on forests near their rural homes.

These community activists soon wanted to unite across the region so they could overcome their isolation and gain a louder voice before government agencies and lawmakers. So volunteers organized CATs as a regional clearinghouse and "umbrella" group.

In 1982 CATs was incorporated, and a year later the group was formally recognized as a non-profit organization. We've been fighting for a planet free of toxic threats ever since.

Opposition to aerial forest spraying may have created CATs, but soon its reach extended to other threats to our health and the environment ranging from depletion of the ozone layer, to unwanted spraying of schools, backyards, farms and roadsides.

Now that we're near the end of CATs 25th official anniversary, we realize we've been too busy to do something fancy to mark the occasion. Instead we've given away hundreds of new memberships.

You too can join for free through the end of 2008, and

your input in figuring out how CATs can keep improving life in northern California is welcome.

CATs' will endure—but it can benefit from your donation so we can pay off the mortgage on our "green" office headquarters or direct fresh energy to our operations. The Organic Planet Festival, our volunteer board of directors – in fact, almost everything that makes CATs tick – requires citizens who give their time, goods and services. Yes, this is a pitch for your greater participation, and it's also a big THANK YOU! Virtually everything we've accomplished has been due to a legion of people who keep CATs purring.

CATs' Staff

Back row: Patty Clary, Director; Vanessa Vasquez; Jessie Misha; Matt Lang.
Front row: Cindy Turnbull; Lindsey Byers. Not pictured: Julia Olson.



CATs' Board of Directors

Jene McCovey, President; Perry Grey-Reneberg, Vice-President; Ramona Sokolow, Secretary; Doug Bryan, Treasurer; Pam Richards; Michelle Smith.

Forget Kwell: Chemicals Are Louse-y Treatments

Head lice, the bane of parents of school-age children, are prime examples of how toxic chemicals can fail. The insecticides lindane and permethrin, two widely used head lice treatments, cannot provide long-term pest management but can cause dangerous and unforeseen consequences.

Lindane is an organochlorine pesticide related to DDT. First registered for agricultural use, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved it for skin and scalp application in the 1950s. Kwell, a 1% lindane shampoo, has been widely used in the Western world on all age groups, frequently several times for one infestation.

But people should know that lindane causes immediate toxicity. It modifies brain function, disrupts the nervous system and can cause seizures, convulsions, vomiting and nausea after a single exposure.

Lindane is a recognized cancer-causing chemical under California's Proposition 65, and in 2002 the state banned its use. Four years later the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) nationally cancelled all agricultural uses, but the FDA still allows pharmaceutical lindane application. As a result, the pesticide continues to contaminate water from unnecessary lice treatments throughout much of the nation.

Lindane is persistent and can be transported long distances. According to California water regulators, a single Kwell lice treatment contains enough lindane to pollute an astonishing six million gallons of water. The chemical has also been found in air, soil, ice, wildlife and humans worldwide but it doesn't do much against lice.

Despite some initial chemical success, the common head louse has evolved into a "super bug" with a well-documented resistance to the toxic effects of lindane.

As for permethrin, a synthetic pyrethroid that kills adult lice but is not as effective for nits, it has been marketed as a "safe and natural" alternative to lindane. But permethrin is a potent and toxic chemical.

Primarily sold over-the-counter, its pharmaceutical use is regulated by the FDA despite the 2006 EPA classification of permethrin as a "likely human carcinogen." Studies in adults have demonstrated nerve function alteration, and a single exposure can cause skin irritation, dizziness and twitching. Permethrin is also a respiratory allergen and causes severe asthma-like responses. Despite these known problems, the Centers for Disease Control continue to recommend Nix, a common permethrin product, as the primary head lice treatment.

It's not just humans who are affected. Permethrin is highly toxic to fish and aquatic invertebrates. The U.S. Geological Survey has found the chemical in ground and surface water in many locations at levels high enough to be toxic to aquatic organisms.

Despite the dangers to humans, the environment and wildlife, an estimated 100 million applications of permethrin now are performed annually in American homes.

And, like with lindane, recent studies indicate that head lice, at least in Western nations, have now developed resistance to the toxic effects of permethrin.



Tug That Bug

Careful combing is the only safe method of delousing. But it requires patience, diligence, a keen eye—and a sense of humor.

Pediculus humanus caitis, aka the head louse, is a tiny insect that lives on the human scalp, where it feeds on blood and lays eggs on hair. Nits, as the eggs are known, stick to the hair shaft but can be removed by careful combing, the only control method that is kind to human health and the environment.

Begin evicting the unwelcome visitors by combing hair into sections with a wide-tooth comb. Apply hair conditioner to each section and thoroughly comb it through with a fine-toothed nit comb, starting at the scalp and working outward. Examine each section of the scalp carefully and use tweezers to painstakingly remove remaining bugs and eggs.

Even a thorough session will need to be repeated in

three days and then again in 10 days to insure that the lice are eradicated. Once away from the scalp and body heat, lice and nits will die in approximately 48 hours.

As for the combs, clean them in hot water and dry them on a towel. Place used towels in a closed bag to wash later.

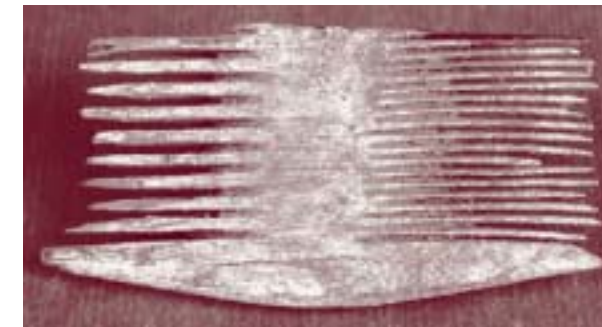
To kill loose pests, washable items should be cleaned in hot water and dried at high heat.

Items that cannot be laundered can be deloused if stored in plastic bags for a few days. Upholstered furniture, carpets and rugs should be vacuumed.

Home insecticides are dangerous and unnecessary: Do Not Spray!

Anyone can become infested with head lice, but children and

people in institutions are most susceptible. As a preventative measure, children should be taught to avoid direct head-to-head contact or sharing hats and brushes when away from home.



Pharaoh's nit comb from an ancient Egyptian tomb

Are The Chemicals A Cure Worse Than The Disease?

The suggestion that herbicides could soon deface an icon as treasured as Yosemite National Park is shocking to many who hear it, but that's what rangers at the revered park have proposed in a misguided attempt to combat invasive plants.

CATs objected to the plan because it will expose park visitors, workers and volunteers to toxic chemicals while introducing another harmful disturbance to the park's environment -- all without any real evidence of need.

Currently uprooted by a legion of dedicated volunteers, the unwanted plants are growing in just a few small areas. Yet park managers feel compelled to build an arsenal of chemicals to combat them.

Similar reflex action has caused state and federal agencies to disregard biological reality and environmental law in other areas of northern California where invasive species are a nagging problem.

How state and federal agencies have approached management of prolific purple loosestrife now spreading along the banks of the Eel River is a prime example.



IVM at work: Golden loosestrife beetle

The plant's presence on the Eel was known for six years before an infusion of cash sent the agencies out in boats to repeatedly spray a persistently toxic herbicide along 25 miles of riverbank, but without the environmental review required under law.

The law in question is the California Environmental Quality Act, and CATs is fighting in the state Court of Appeal to defend the public's right to be involved when important environmental decisions are made.

Without the required environmental review, critical research that shows spraying actually increases

the spread of purple loosestrife was not considered by Humboldt County or state agencies. No IVM plan was developed to allow introduction of loosestrife-eating bugs.

Poisoning The Waters

Similarly, in what's been described by a federal judge as an "execution," U.S. and California agencies are gearing up to use chemicals to wipe out non-native fish once planted to improve fishing success.

CATs has stopped such poisoning of a wilderness stream before, convincing a federal court to halt a team already onsite to pour the chemicals in the eastern Sierra.

Now bureaucrats have revived this plan to "sterilize" waterways so they can reintroduce genetically pure trout prized by anglers. They again are acting despite the shortage of data about species extermination likely to result -- or even whether their prized fish will ultimately be deprived of food because of the indiscriminate poisoning.

On another front, CATs' opposition to needless pesticide use led to a vastly improved plan by the Modoc National Forest.

In a draft report released to the public three years ago, Modoc's managers proposed herbicide spraying on as many as 8,000 acres to destroy several invasive plants that had taken root and to expand future spraying to many more acres without further review of environmental impacts.

CATs To The Rescue

Though the areas of invasive species were described as small sites that, due to their size, would present minimal impact, CATs found buried in the report evidence that one was well over 5,000 acres and, based on the impracticality and harm poised by the plan, CATs protested it vigorously.

Now Modoc managers have released their final plan. In it they have recognized many of the points that CATs had raised and adopted IVM as their approach. Now they plan to spray less than 60 acres per year, a vast improvement over the original plan.

Also incorporated into the new plan is the use of goats for grazing weeds, plus clipping seed heads and placing mulches and tarps. Further disturbance of the soil with physical methods will be avoided.

IVM: It's Very Manageable

Using Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) may not provide scorched-earth success in the way "silver bullet" herbicides do, but over the long run, it's less expensive -- especially when health and environmental costs are considered.

Keeping populations of established weeds below where they cause too much damage is a goal of IVM. Eradication efforts are limited to small populations, before harmful numbers are established, and serious practitioners soon learn that their success often depends on avoiding herbicides -- even those considered least toxic.

The simplest IVM plan of attack can be the most effective. IVM replaces calendar-driven herbicide application with monitoring of weed problems so that the potential for damage is determined before action is taken. As a result, "do nothing" is a viable option even when unwanted plants are present.

IVM utilizes natural forces to control weeds based on their life cycle and biological processes. Often just reducing soil disturbance can stop weed spread. Other methods involve suppressing growth with tarps and mulch, or crowding weeds out by introducing wanted plants that out-compete for space. Mowing can be a critical component of weed control, but care must be taken to mow high enough to avoid creating conditions that are favorable to weeds.

If all else fails, using a least toxic herbicide is the option of last resort. But if well thought out and executed, an IVM strategy will likely have worked before even natural chemicals are needed.

Lessons From The Birds And Bees ...And From The Bats And Frogs, Too

Seven decades of using pesticides to grow food has devastated populations worldwide of our traditional agricultural helpers: birds, bees, frogs and bats.

Although toxic chemicals have been implicated as a root cause in their slide towards oblivion, the chemicals continue to be pumped into the environment. As a result, we may soon find food production completely dependent on pesticides, the opportunity to farm organically eliminated and widespread food shortages a reality.

Many of the pesticides most toxic to birds are already banned or restricted. Yet the killing goes on. A case in point is the barn owl, which has a huge appetite for crop-destroying gophers.

Once the most widespread raptor in the nation, the stealthy nighttime killer is fading away--often the victim of organophosphate insecticides that also affect the nerves and brains of humans.

These chemicals cause disorientation in raptors that can lead them to crash into windows or get electrocuted on power lines. Though the cause of these deaths is often pesticide "intoxication," experts say this factor is rarely investigated or reported to authorities who might rein in the pesticide use.

Bees Stung



Or consider two insect-killers recently introduced to the market that government scientists say are poisoning vast numbers of bees, prompting the U.S. Department of Agriculture to declare an "impending pollination crisis" affecting an astonishing one-third of our food supply.

Residues of these two insecticides, imidacloprid and clothianiden, are absorbed into plants grown from coated seeds and move into nectar at levels that cause reproductive problems, impaired foraging ability and altered memory and brain metabolism in exposed bees.

What's more, when the chemicals intermingle with fungicides, the toxicity increases more than a thousand-fold, a likely occurrence since both groups of chemicals are used in many of the same agricultural settings.

Also being poisoned are bats. Long misunderstood and feared, these flying mammals are another critical component of food production that have suffered population losses from chemicals.

Their exposure often occurs via pesticide-tainted insects, lots of them, since bats eat almost their body weight in insects each night. The same organophosphate insecticides that affect raptors have been found in the bodies of bats and may be the actual cause of many "accidental" deaths.

In addition, newer pesticides may be the underlying cause of a fungus that's killing off immune-weakened bats in the northeastern U.S. Researchers have found that

intestinal bacteria necessary for digestion are reduced or non-existent in infected bats--a possible effect of recently developed pesticides. Proving this link will take time, and bats meanwhile are disappearing at an alarming rate.



Frogs Croaking Fast

Perhaps worst off of all are frogs, which are dying off more rapidly than any other animal.

Their crucial role in controlling insect populations and their precipitous decline correlates with an increase in insect pests of food crops.

Ironically, insecticides are among the chemicals responsible for much of the frog's demise. Several pesticides have dire effects on frogs at concentrations commonly found in the environment. One is the organophosphate malathion, which indirectly decimates tadpole populations by altering their food chain.

Frog populations have been found to be reduced downwind of organophosphate applications in California. Even herbicides are deadly: atrazine dramatically affects the sexual development of male frogs, turning them into hermaphrodites, and glyphosate (in "Round-Up") has been deemed "extremely lethal" to frogs.

While pesticides have been shown to have dire effects on animals and bugs so vital to food production, human efforts to stop use of these chemicals may be too slow to stave off extinctions around the world.

Vote For "O"

Wherever you live, choosing to eat organic food is the most important step you can take to help save wild animals that are instrumental in the production of our food.

A CATs analysis has uncovered several crops in particular that are so tainted by pesticides that they are literally killing birds, bees, bats and frogs. The list includes corn and soy which are ubiquitous in packaged food. That's why eating simple, unprocessed food is the best first step.

The list of organic foods to buy includes all citrus, grapes (that means wine and raisins, too), tomatoes in all its forms, and nuts -- including almonds, walnuts and pistachios. Add "only organic" potatoes and carrots to the list, too.

The CATs analysis also found that, despite what you might think, most of these organic foods are available at competitive prices.

The recent national election is proof that individual votes, when combined, can add up to important change.

Vote for organic and help change the world.