

JUDGE HIDES THE DANGERS OF PESTICIDES

DELANO, December 31--Hearings on a request by crop dusting firms in the Kern County area to deny access to public records on the use of pesticides to UFWOC attorneys will be held in Bakersfield on Wednesday, January 29, according to UFWOC General Counsel Jerome Cohen.

Cohen said after he attempted to view the records, on file in the office of Agricultural Commissioner Sheldon Morley, on August 20, Superior Court Judge J. Kelly Steele issued a restraining order prohibiting the Commissioner to show him the records.

the Union's legal department is conducting a study of the possible dangers to farm workers of the numerous toxic substances used in agricultural pest control.

Union attorneys have said they have considerable evidence that the farm chemicals can be a serious health hazard to farm workers, and that the public records will show exactly which chemicals are used in the fields.

Assistant General Counsel David Averback, who will represent Cohen at the January 29 hearings, said he expected Steven Wall will represent the crop dusters and Kern

County Counsel Ralph Gordon will represent the Agricultural Commission.

Testimony from physicians, scientists and farm workers will be presented at the hearings, Averback said.

There is no guarantee, however, that if the court order barring access to the records is lifted on January 29 that the Union will then be able to examine the records.

Morley's office might still deny access to the records on administrative grounds, Cohen explained, even though there is no longer a

The Threat of Chemical Poisons

The menace of fertilizers and other farm chemicals pose a serious threat to the health of the public in general and farm workers especially, recently released information shows.

While officials of the United Farm Workers have continued to fight the battle for adequate protection of workers who come in contact with dangerous chemicals, scientists have been studying the effect of heavy fertilization on the water supply.

A newly-elected director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science has warned that farmers and growers in the United States are dumping 7 million tons of nitrogen compounds from chemical fertilizers into the soil each year, and that this heavy use of chemical fertilizers is polluting soil and water and posing an increasing danger to the health of inhabitants of farm areas.

The scientist, Dr. Barry Commoner, a noted botanist, ecologist, and director of the Center for the Biology of Natural Systems at Washington University in St. Louis, warned in a speech to fellow scientists at a convention in Dallas that "the heavily farmed areas of California probably represent the most severe public health hazard from

nitrate originating in fertilizers."

Commoner noted that nitrates have already polluted the San Joaquin River and most streams, creeks, and sloughs in the Central Valley, and contribute to the pollution of San Francisco Bay. Some agricultural communities, specifically Delano, California, have publically warned that tap water is contaminated by a dangerously high level of nitrates and may be unsafe for babies to drink. Chemical fertilizers, and not sewage, have been proven to be the source of the contamination.

Nitrate compounds themselves are not directly dangerous, Commoner noted, but they are easily converted into nitrites "which can be dangerously poisonous to humans."

Nitrate-polluted water has caused infant outbreaks of an anemia-like disease called methemoglobinemia, which can lead to breathing difficulties, retard mental growth, and even cause death, Commoner said.

Research has turned up dozens of cases where nitrite poisoning has already caused disease in infants fed baby food vegetables that have been exposed to bacteria after their containers were opened. The bacteria quickly convert harmless nitrates to nitrites.

The conclusion of Dr. Commoner's

research is that the nitrates are a chemical menace, choking our rivers, killing our fish, polluting our drinking water, and in some counties, already endangering the health of our children.

To counter this menace, Commoner suggested the use of "pelletized" fertilizers that would release their nitrogen far more slowly than present chemicals do; confining fertilizer operations to periods when rain is unlikely to carry dangerous chemicals in to the water supply, and the development of new technologies to spread organic sewage effluents back on the soil as useful, safe, natural fertilizers.

The United Farm Workers has been especially concerned with the problems of chemical fertilizers, since most farm workers live in areas where the danger from nitrate poisoning is extremely high. The Union has also been concerned with the health and safety of workers applying these chemical fertilizers, and working in close proximity to such chemicals.

State and county officials have sought to prevent the Union from gaining access to information and files on the subject. Union Attorney Jerome Cohen's requests

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