

POISONS: Enough is Enough!

The other day Wingshooter John Copley organised the last shoot of the season with some friends. As usual, it promised to be a good shoot because there were plenty of Guinea fowl. The gamebird populations on the farm are healthy because the habitat is sound and the farmer takes particular care to prevent the deliberate poisoning of gamebirds for meat by his employees — a practice which has become a national epidemic. After an active rough shooting session, John's GSP Jake drank some water from a puddle at an irrigation pivot. Some time later, he became disoriented and anxious. He developed a fixed stare with dilated pupils, fell over and had convulsions. Jake was loaded into a car and raced to the nearest veterinarian. *En route* he went into a coma and died.

We extend our sincere sympathy to John and his family and regret having to publish this sad account, but are doing so to make all Wingshooters aware of the deadly danger of agricultural poisons to birds, dogs and humans alike.

The use of irrigation pivots to apply fertiliser, growth stimulants, weed-killers and pesticides through the water system has become a widespread agricultural practice. In this case, some leakage of a highly poisonous pesticide called *endosulfan* apparently occurred at the pivot's mixing tanks. *Endosulfan* is manufactured by FMC Corporation in the USA and is sold in South Africa under trade names of 'Thiodan' and 'Thionex'. At a dosage rate of just 50 mg per kg, it kills 50% of rats tested (LD50). This means that just 4 grams (less than one teaspoon) of *endosulfan* can kill an adult person of 80 kg. But *endosulfan* is not just poisonous if swallowed. Labourers holding the marker flags during aerial spraying of crops (yes, unbelievably, *endosulfan* is also sprayed from aircraft even though, according to the World Health Organisation, it is 'highly toxic' to fish and some birds) have developed symptoms of poisoning after inhalation and skin absorption. In one of hundreds of poisoning cases documented by the WHO, schoolchildren in South America developed symptoms (which included signs of brain damage) after receiving a dosage of just 3 mg/kg! Even more alarming is the fact that *endosulfan* is a persistent poison (it is in the same group of chemicals as the infamous DDT and Dieldrin) and can get into the underground water — on almost all farms boreholes are the only source of drinking water!

The pesticide container lists the standard instructions: 'Avoid contact with eyes and skin, do not eat, drink or smoke while handling, destroy empty containers,' etc, etc... but no effective efforts were made to train farmers using the substance.



The national government is fully aware of these facts but seems complacent even in respect of a deadly poison such as *aldicarb*. One of the so-called 'dirty dozen' of pesticides, *aldicarb* has an LD50 of 1 mg/kg; just 80 mg, about equivalent to the amount that fits on this dot ●, can kill a grown man! Yet the scientific adviser to the Registrar of Agricultural Remedies (Act 36) of the Department of Agriculture says that they have no record of the amount of *aldicarb* which is used annually. In the USA toxic levels of this deadly poison were found in some bananas used to make baby food and in consignments of potatoes and cucumbers for human consumption! Earlier this year, tons of illicit *aldicarb* destined for sale at taxi-ranks as 'Two-step' (used to poison hundreds of dogs in suburban areas), were reportedly confiscated by the SAP. 'Aldicarb is out of control in Southern Africa. It is freely available at taxi ranks and in muti shops,' Tim Snow of the Poison Working Group told Fiona Macleod of the Mail&Guardian.

Enough is enough! At the coming annual meetings, drastic steps by the SA Wingshooters Association will be discussed, including possible international collective action.

Perhaps Jake did not die in vain... △



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