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Kansas State University
Department of Forestry
Manhattan, KS 66506

Abstract

Funk, R. C. 1986. **The politics and perception of pesticides.** *Arbor Age* 6 (60): 12-14.

Much of the current concern about pesticides is based on the myth that "natural is good" and what psychologists call "fear of the unknown." There is no separation between *natural* and *chemical*. Everything in our world is made of chemicals. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the foods that we eat, all consist of chemicals. Even organically grown foods contain combinations of complex chemicals, many of which are highly toxic if taken alone in sufficient quantity. The toxicity of a chemical is dependent upon its chemical structure and not on whether it is natural or man made. The best definition of a poison is "too much" of anything. Plants produce toxic chemicals in large amounts, apparently as a primary defense against the hordes of bacterial, fungal, insect, and animal predators. The variety of toxic chemicals that occur in nature is so great that *organic* chemists have been characterizing them for over 100 years—and new plant chemicals are still being discovered. Uncertainty over the long-range effects of pesticides is perhaps the major fear of those opposed to their use. Can the most minute trace of certain chemicals cause cancer or other problems long after the exposure has taken place. Many scientists believe that the body's natural defense mechanisms protect against cell damage from these chemicals, even though high levels used in laboratory tests may indeed overwhelm the system.