

Toxic herbicide on pot could pose serious danger

By Rod Murphy

Marijuana, which has been shown by several public and private studies to be relatively harmless, is becoming a potential hazard to its users, according to recent evidence.

The Mexican government, with financial aid from the United States, has been spraying marijuana fields with paraquat, a highly toxic herbicide, in order to curb growth of the weed.

The immediate and long-term effects of smoking paraquat-tainted marijuana are not yet clear. However, preliminary animal tests by the National Institute on Drug Abuse show that smoking the contaminated pot can cause permanent lung damage known as fibrosis.

Paraquat, a nitrogen-based herbicide, has been used by farmers since the early 1960s.

The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws has been filing suit, writing letters and lobbying legislators hoping to end U.S. aid to Mexico's spraying operations.

On March 13, NORML filed suit in federal court to halt U.S. involvement in the



spraying of paraquat on Mexican marijuana fields.

Keith Stroup, National Director of NORML, was quoted in the organization's newsletter as saying "it appears the federal government has taken a plant, which a number of government reports and scientific studies have acknowledged is a relatively innocuous plant, and given it the potential of being the 'killer weed' which the government propogandized against in the 1930s, 40s and 50s."

According to statistics released by NORML, 20 percent of marijuana samples seized at the border were contaminated with the herbicide.

Paraquat-tainted pot, once harvested, can not be detected unless samples are analyzed by a research laboratory, according to NORML.

NORML has urged any marijuana suspected of herbicide contamination be sent anonymously to a firm in California to be tested.

PharmChem Research Foundation, 1844 Bay Road, Palo Alto California, will test samples for a \$5 fee, according to NORML. A five digit identification number also should be enclosed to protect the identity of the sender.

While the national organization is active in the paraquat issue, local NORML chapters are less so, according to Mark Connett, spokesman for UNL's NORML chapter.

"We don't contribute much to that effort," he said.

The Lincoln chapter still is being formed and no officers have yet been elected, he said.

Connett said he has talked to legislators

about the problem and has attempted to provide information on the subject. ASUN's Government Liaison Committee also has taken a stand on the issue.

In a vote taken Tuesday, April 4, GLC officially took a stand against the federal government's position on paraquat use in Mexico, according to Bob Gleason, co-chairman.

Even though the position now is officially sanctioned by GLC, the actual vote was "overwhelmed by non-voting members," Gleason said.

GLC members who oppose the government position will write congressmen and people in the executive branch, he said.

Other GLC members felt that the organization should not establish a position on the matter, he said.

Gleason said a good number of college students could be affected by paraquat poisoning. However, the organization had no evidence that marijuana smoked in Nebraska has been contaminated by the herbicide, he said.

According to a nation-wide survey by the National Institute of Drug Abuse in 1976, 48 percent of all college students have tried marijuana and 24 percent are regular users.

Nine cars vandalized in university lots, no suspects

Nine cars parked in several UNL lots were vandalized early Thursday morning by what appeared to be a BB or pellet gun, according to Sgt. Al Broadstone of University Police.

Eight of the cars were discovered by University Police in the Area 2 lot near 17th and R streets, and the ninth in the Area 23 lot west of the Harper-Schramm-Smith complex, Broadstone said.

Eight rear windows, a side window and a CB antennae were broken, he said.

Damages are estimated at \$1,000. Owners of the cars were contacted by University Police Thursday.

There are no suspects, Broadstone said, but police believe the incidents occurred sometime between 3:30 and 6 a.m.

However, Broadstone said there "might be a connection" with several tire-slashing incidents near city campus last weekend.

Lt. Ron Bruder of the Lincoln Police said eight cars parked on 19th Street between Vine and R streets were found with one or more tires slashed.

Broadstone added that three cars parked in an Area 2 lot near 19th and S streets last weekend also had their tires slashed.

Lincoln Police have no suspects, Bruder said, but are working with the University Police on all incidents.

Broadstone requested that anyone with any information contact University Police. Names will remain confidential, he said.



Photo by Bob Pearson

This car was one of several vandalized Thursday morning in the area 2 parking lots east of the Cather-Pound residence halls.

Bill may increase some retirement checks

By Gail Stork

UNL professors, clerks, secretaries and janitors who retired prior to 1961 may get a raise in their 1920-based pension before this legislative session is over, according to State Sen. JoAnn Maxey, from Lincoln, who introduced the retirement bill.

She said the bill provides a retirement check increase to any university employee who retired before 1961, when the state began to match university retirement funds.

Maxey said the retirement benefits now received by pre-1961 retirees are fixed at a rate far below the cost of living. These senior citizens still are paying high utility bills and high food costs, but have not had an increase in income since they retired, she said.

One man currently receives \$12 a month, Maxey said, and would receive \$24 if the bill passes.

An 80-year-old retiree's pension check would go from \$100 to \$350 a month. However, these examples are extremes, she said.

Not all retirees' benefits will double, Maxey said, but only those who were at the bottom of the pay scale while employed at UNL.

For example, a professor retiring at the same time as a secretary would receive an increase, but not as great a percentage as the lower-paid secretary, Maxey said.

This "one-shot, one-time increase" will affect 900 retirees, she said, including those who retired after 1961 but worked at UNL prior to the start of the new retirement program.

She said these retirees would receive an increase according to how many years they worked before 1961 and what their salary was then.

Lee Chatfield, chairman of the legislative committee on the Emeriti Association, said some 70- to 85-year-old retired professors receive only \$80 to \$100 a month as pension.

The proposed bill primarily will benefit these people, he said. However, he said, he also would receive a slight increase, or about \$10 a month for the fourteen years he worked before the cut-off date.

Maxey said the bill is fair because of the high cost of living 70- to 85-year-old retirees with small paychecks are fighting.

LB198 is awaiting a final vote by the Legislature before going to Gov. J. James Exon for his signature.

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