

Fact and Comment

By Steve Forbes, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

“With all thy getting get understanding”



Deadly Prejudice

NEARLY EVERY MONTH ALMOST AS MANY PEOPLE DIE FROM malaria as were killed by the tsunami waves in the Indian Ocean. Most of malaria's victims, some 2 million a year, are children under the age of 5. More than 300 million annually suffer from this debilitating disease that drains survivors of their mental and physical energies. Incredibly, there's an easy, proven and cheap way to eradicate most of the globe's malaria—DDT. Yet in one of history's more murderously myopic ongoing actions, most advanced countries and international agencies discourage its use. Why? Blame Rachel Carson's seismically influential—and now largely discredited—book, *Silent Spring*, first published in 1962. In it she blames DDT for imperiling birds and people, portraying it as a blight of almost biblical proportions. It ain't so. As Dr. Elizabeth Whelan of the American Council on Science & Health once put it, there “has never been a documented case of human illness or death in the U.S. as a result of the standard and accepted use of pesticides.” The British medical journal *The Lancet* similarly notes that after 40 years of research no significant health threat from DDT has been found.



A health worker sprays a small amount of DDT on a home. Wider use would save millions of lives.

Indiscriminate use of DDT will indeed have a deleterious impact on certain birds. But we're not advocating that. The use of tiny amounts inside a house or hut is all that's needed. As Nicholas Kristof observed in one of his *New York Times* columns, “Four hundred fifty thousand people can be protected [from malaria] with the same amount [of DDT] that was applied in the 1960s to a single 1,000-acre American cotton farm.... Humans are far better off exposed to DDT than exposed to malaria.”

Yet Carson's book has made DDT taboo—with ghastly results. Some 30 million to 60 million people have perished unnecessarily. In 1996, for example, South Africa stopped using DDT, and its malaria cases increased tenfold. Four years later South Africa reversed itself and employed DDT again. The result: The incidence of malaria promptly dropped almost 80%. Nevertheless, too many health officials cling to alternatives that are only fractionally as effective. That various agencies, governments, health officials and environmentalists have deliberately dissuaded the world from using DDT is one of the most immoral moves of modern times.