



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Section V: Anticipating Hostile Reaction from the Chemical Industry

Author(s)

Caroline Whitbeck

Description

An essay on the anticipated reaction to Rachel Carson's book, 'Silent Spring'.

Body

The chemical industry would be jeopardized by her book. Certainly a detailed expose on the harmful effects of the highly successful pesticides would diminish the profits for these powerful chemical interests. In 1958, the year Carson began her book, almost 200 million dollars' worth of pesticides was sold. Four years later, when the book appeared, almost half a billion dollars' worth was sold.

In writing such a book, Rachel Carson expected a bellicose reaction from the chemical industry. Even before the book was published, officials were reluctant to provide information. One denied serious losses to wildlife due to pesticides and asked: "Because of your obviously intense interest in this subject, I should appreciate knowing your affiliation in preparing your report."Graham, 28.

Carson learned about other biologists' works showing the harmful effects of pesticides. But the letters ended requesting anonymity because the biologists were afraid of losing their jobs.

The Department of the Interior did not pay much attention to the unknown dangers of pesticides. Natural resources were basically looked upon in economic terms. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife labeled critics "'subversives' hostile to the spirit of free enterprise."Graham, 30. Because the staff there believed that there was over-population, they did not oppose the use of pesticides to get rid of some fish. The US Department of Agriculture insisted that DDT use, with precautions, would have no adverse effects.

The medical field did not show much more promise. Of the pamphlets produced by the American Medical Associations, Rachel Carson wrote that the position of the AMA seemed ambiguous, and she felt that the AMA would be on the fence or even on the wrong side of the fence if they were asked to take a stand.Graham, 30. (We have not used Rachel Carson's exact words because Fran Collins, the Trustee of Rachel Carson's estate, does not want any quotations from Carson to appear on the WWW. You may read her exact words in the source cited.)

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Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario