



# Times-News

## The Pink-Washing of Cancer

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David Weintraub

ECO NOTES

My youngest cousin was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was pregnant with her third child. A terrible decision ensued, who to protect, which life was more important? My cousin deferred any cancer treatment until after the baby was born, but the cancer ravaged her body and took her before her baby had the chance to say “mama.” My wife and I “raced for the cure” in her name every year and supported many of the cancer support networks that expressed concern for finding a cure for this tragic disease. But I wondered where did her cancer come from? Was it her lifestyle? She was an Olympic-level swimmer. Was it her genetics? There was cancer in the family history but at 33, it was curious why she would have gotten it so young.



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As I studied my cousin’s history I discovered that she grew up in one of the worst cancer “hot spots” in the country where potato farms were prevalent and the pesticides of choice were DDT, chlordane and Temik used to fight the Colorado potato beetle. These chemicals have been linked to cancer for many years which is why they are banned for use in this country. In her older years, she lived on a golf course and numerous studies link the use of pesticides on golf courses to higher cancer rates.

It is a comfort that there is growing awareness of cancer and numerous efforts to seek a cure, however, precious little efforts are ever directed towards finding out WHY we get cancer in the first place. When I was a child growing up, cancer was a very rare occurrence. We heard about folks who got the disease, but didn’t know anyone personally with it. Today no family is left unscathed. It’s hard to believe that cancer is solely a result of too many French fries or genetics. In fact, there is growing evidence that cancer’s dramatic increase in our everyday lives is connected to the environment: what we put in our water, our air and our food. Yet lost in the wave of pink ribbons, treatment options and testing facilities is a focus on reducing risks inherent in an increasingly toxified world.

### The Cancer Establishment

The primary sponsor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, AstraZeneca, is a British-based multinational giant that manufactures the cancer drug tamoxifen as well as fungicides and herbicides, including the carcinogen acetochlor. Its Perry, Ohio, chemical plant is the third-largest source of potential cancer-causing pollution in the United States, releasing 53,000 pounds of recognized carcinogens into the air. The American Cancer Society has a vice president of a major herbicide manufacturer sitting on its board of directors. High-ranking officials in the National Cancer Institute routinely accept lucrative posts in the cancer-drug industry. Such tangled financial interests explain why the cancer establishment—the medical institutions, corporations, and agencies that control cancer research, treatment, and education—continues to ignore mounting evidence that many cases of cancer are avoidable.

These conflicts may also help explain why, many decades and billions of dollars after President Nixon declared war on cancer, the risk of breast cancer is higher than ever. In 1950, an American woman faced a lifetime risk of 1 in 20; today that risk has more than doubled to 1 in 8. The millions of tons of chemicals that get into our environment every year and the additives and hormones in food have a pronounced effect on everything from the skyrocketing number of 8 year old girls reaching puberty, the plummeting fertility rates in males and females and the continuing scourge of cancer and degenerative diseases. Around 85,000 synthetic chemicals are registered for use today in the U.S. with 20 new chemicals released each week: plastics, pesticides, refrigerants, insulators, dyes, detergents, degreasers and deodorants. Only about 7 percent of them have been tested at all for their cancer-causing potential, and over 90 percent have never been tested for effects on human health. Our government currently regulates fewer than 200 of these chemicals.

### Finding Solutions

According to the world-renowned cancer prevention expert, Dr. Samuel Epstein, cancer does not strike randomly but is often tied to certain risk factors such as exposure to toxic substances, x-rays, carcinogenic medicines, and food contaminants. Rather than family history being determinative, it is a combination of factors that often play a role and people have control over whether they expose themselves to many of these risks.

To evaluate the risk factors involved in cancer, one need only remember the words of Rachel Carson, a breast cancer victim herself, who said, “what we do to nature, we do to ourselves.” Carson was one of the first scientists to argue that technology has consequences. We cannot escape the toxic world we’ve created for ourselves, but we can take steps to effect change. On a community level, we can help monitor our streams and encourage landowners, developers and farmers to use methods that leave a smaller impact on our waterways. We can work with our neighbors to limit stormwater damage which tends to bring toxins into our streams that adversely affect the web of life. We can buy organic foods or grow our own and limit the use of pesticides, mole killers and plant treatments that kill “bad” bugs/animals but whose harmful effect on man is largely unmonitored. And finally, we can work with local environmental efforts to learn to “tread lightly” on our planet – action which will benefit our health and that of every other living thing around us.

*David Weintraub is Executive Director of ECO, the Environmental and Conservation Organization, which is dedicated to protecting the mountain region’s natural heritage. ECO can be reached at (828) 692-0385 or online at [www.eco-wnc.org](http://www.eco-wnc.org).*