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Research Question – Essay 5

Why Organic

Go organic! Save the world! Be eco-friendly! Live green! Choose biodegradable products! So, what is all the hype about? Going organic has many advantages. There are health and environmental benefits, as well as economic benefits. From pet care, to home care, to skin care, going organic can be extremely beneficial for the consumer and the environment.

Using organic pet care and insect control products are two areas where consumers can improve. At year-end 2011, 56.0 percent of households owned pets (Burns par. 5). This is over half of the world's households that could be living in a healthier way. Organic pet care products are safer for the pet's caregiver, the pet, and the environment. Research has shown that women who were pregnant and used traditional pet care products with pyrethrins in them were more likely to have a child with autism than women who did not (Nutt par. 7). Many over-the-counter pet care products, especially for dogs and insect control products have pyrethrins in them. Dog shampoos, flea and tick sprays, flea and tick collars, insect spray, and other traditional pet care products use this as the active ingredient. Pyrethrins can be toxic to humans, animals, and the environment, when used incorrectly. Unfortunately, many consumers misread labels and use the product incorrectly. Pyrethrin toxicity symptoms in humans include asthma-like respiratory problems, sneezing, headache, nausea, incoordination, tremors, convulsions, redness of the face, and swelling, burning and itching of the skin. Longer term exposure has led to possible brain

defects in babies from exposed mothers, probably due to the synergist often accompanying pyrethroid toxins in most products. There is some evidence of pyrethroid toxins causing carcinogen effects in rats (Stein par. 5). Chemical laden, over-the-counter pet shampoos can dry a pet's skin out, which causes them to scratch incessantly. This will cause them to develop unnecessary rashes and sores, and cause their hair to fall out in patchy areas. It cannot be comfortable for them. The symptoms in mammals of pyrethrin toxicosis are hyper salivation, weakness, vomiting, muscle tremors (one of the more recognizable symptoms), seizures and death (Stein par. 5). If these types of products can do this to the human caregivers and their pets, think about what they are doing to the environment. The EPA states:

Pyrethroids are highly toxic to aquatic organisms. Because the pyrethroids can accumulate in sediments, risk to sediment-dwelling organisms is an area of particular concern. Recent water quality monitoring efforts in California have identified pyrethroids in sediments of water bodies adjacent to residential/urban areas. These monitoring data, coupled with additional pyrethroid-specific data submitted to the Agency, highlight existing concerns regarding residential uses of pyrethroid pesticide products and movement into non-target areas through runoff or spray drift that may occur during applications. (EPA par. 24)

Another negative effect of pest control is that it kills bees with as little discrimination as pest insects, which has disastrous implications for our future as “bees are credited with approximately 85 percent of the pollinating activity necessary to supply about one-third of the nation's food supply” (qtd. in Foss 1). There are cheaper and healthier alternatives such as vinegar, lemon juice or lemons, a variety of essential oils, and other organic methods that can be used for weed control, other lawn care concerns, insect control, and pet maintenance. If the chemicals and

toxins from these products are getting into the environment, then they are also affecting other people and future generations. More things need to be done to educate consumers about the effects of this potentially highly toxic chemical in many pet and lawn care products that are on the market.

In addition to the pet care and lawn care products that contain toxic chemicals, there are many household cleaning products that contain a variety of toxic chemicals. Some researchers have suggested that traditional cleaning products can contribute to cancer, respiratory problems, reproductive abnormalities, allergic reactions, and behavioral problems. Experts also believe that by using traditional cleaning products in the household, even as little as one time per week, increases the chance of developing Asthma. Sara Snow, author of *Sara Snow's Fresh Living* asserts, “green cleaning products can reduce the chances of developing asthma, which ‘today is the most common chronic illness and the leading cause of school absences due to chronic illness across the country’” (Reichert, Snow, and Weber par. 6). The chemicals from traditional household cleaning products linger in the home for quite a long time. Couple this with the fact that a home is an enclosed area, the potential for health risks are even greater than the use of toxic products used outside the home. As with the alternative pet care and lawn care products, there are also alternatives that can be used as cleaning products for the home. Baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, essential oils, and alcohol are just a few of the natural ingredients that can be used to make household cleaning products. Some of the same ingredients can also be used to make laundry detergent and other things used in and around the home. These *natural* products are by far cheaper, provide more antibacterial properties, and are a healthier choice for the consumer and the environment (Ewer 1).

Furthermore, the use of organic skin care products can provide even more health benefits for the consumer. Polyethylene Glycol, DEA, Mercury, Nitrosamines, and Dioxane are just a few of the potentially harmful ingredients that are used to manufacture skin care and make-up products. One study of a popular over-the-counter skin care product in Saudi concluded:

Treated mice showed significant weight loss, and kidneys showed the highest mercury content. Marked histological changes were clearly noted in the kidney Although this popular skin care product's mercury content is less than the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) permissible limits, histopathological changes in the brain, kidney, and liver tissues are evidence of its possible toxicity.

(Al-Saleh et al. 1)

Unfortunately for the unknowing consumer, the FDA does not control or monitor the ingredients in these products as they do with food and drug products. Government regulations allow virtually any ingredient to be used in the manufacturing of products that we use daily on our skin, hair, and nails, and in the water we drink (Group par. 2). The skin is a large system of the body and easily absorbs anything. Once absorbed into the skin, the chemicals enter the bloodstream. Once into the bloodstream, the chemicals are carried throughout the body. It does not have a way to expel these things. This leaves the consumer susceptible to a variety of health problems, including liver abnormalities, kidney damage, contact dermatitis, and other health issues. Because the FDA does not monitor skin care and make-up products as they should, the consumer *must* read the labels and remain educated on these types of products to avoid the ones with harmful ingredients. Do not be fooled by a label that says it is all *natural* or *organic*, because this is not necessarily the truth. Again, the FDA does not monitor this. Therefore, it is the consumer's responsibility to ensure the product is really what it says it is.

There are many budget-friendly *organic* options available that can provide safer health and environmental benefits to the consumer. However, it is up to the consumer, not the manufacturer, to make the wiser decisions. As previously mentioned, many diseases and health ailments are linked to the use of traditional pet care, skin care, make-up, and home care products. The only way to prevent this is for consumers to educate themselves more on the chemicals in these products and choose to use organic alternatives instead. Otherwise, consumers are setting themselves, their families, the environment, and the world as a whole up for detrimental conditions in the future.

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