2,4,5-T Gets Clean Bill From Science Group

American Council on Science & Health last week recommended that the current uses of the berbicide 2,4,5- T in rice fields and rangeland in the US be continued and that other uses, suspended earlier by Environmental Protection Agency for application in forests, railways and highways, and landscaping be reinstated.

At a news conference in Washington, the nonprofit scientific group released its own comprehensive review of human health effects due to exposures to the phenoxy herbicide. A panel of scientists and consultants was on hand to take questions from reporters and a number of others, including Federal officials.

Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, executive director of ACSH, said in a statement that there is "no scientific evidence presented to date (that) has shown any convincing relationship between the traditional domestic use of 2,4,5-T and any illnesses in humans.

"However," her statement continues, "because of a lack of scientific evidence concerning the use of Agent Orange in Vietman and the amounts to which servicemen were exposed, our study focuses only on health efforts that might arise from 2,4,5-T use here in the US. There is no evidence that, when used properly, 2,4,5-T causes miscarriages or birth defects in human beings."

The release of a 97-page report by ACSH, "The Health Effects of Herbicide 2,4,5-T," came while the regulatory proceeding before an administrative law judge involving EPA, Dow Chemical and others, is in recess. The recess was requested last month, while the disputing parties to the agency's rebuttable presumption against registration (RPAR) process strive to settle the matter.

Spokesmen for both Dow and EPA indicate that the negotiations will continue on into May.

The chemical 2,4,5-T is one of two related ingredients in Agent Orange, the other being 2,4-D. This phenoxy herbicide mixture was used in military defoliation operations during the war in Vietnam. Veterans of that conflict have claimed that exposure to the defoliant has caused cancer, birth defects and other illnesses in themselves and their children.

Two studies known as Alsea I and II (from the Alsea Basin area of Oregon) of women living in this forested area and who experienced miscarriages are cited in the ACSH report. Alsea II, a continua-

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tion of the first study, provided the basis for the EPA's 1979 suspension order on 2,4,5-T.

Both studies are criticized in the ACSH report, because of statistical and epidemiological flaws, among other factors.

Dr. Robert Devlin, professor of agriculture at the University of Massachusetts, and an advisor to the council, points to the problems of 2,4,5-T's "unavoidable contaminant," dioxin, which is 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-para-dioxin.

"Dioxin is a potent toxin that can cause extensive damage to animals. However, monitoring studies for dioxin residues in the environment have shown that dioxin is rarely found and when found, the amounts have not been large enough to represent a health hazard," Dr. Devlin says.

Dr. Jason Berger, director of the International Division Professional Consultants in Occupational Health, Inc., said at the news conference that a "blue-ribbon" panel of scientists, who studied the 1976 chemical accident in Seveso, Italy in which the dioxin contaminant was released, found acne of a severe type (chloracne).

The Council's report discusses this chemical accident in greater detail, while also covering a March 8, 1949 accident at the Monsanto plant in Nitro, West Virginia, in which workers exposed to dioxin developed symptoms of chloracne following release of the contaminant from the trichlorophenol process.