



Citizens question senator's apology

By [Jane Stebbins, Pilot staff writer](#) July 24, 2015 09:51 pm

Cedar Valley residents whose property was illegally sprayed by herbicides don't think much of a public apology issued this week by Oregon Senator Jeff Kruse, who denigrated them on the Senate floor this spring.

"Number one," said resident Kathryn Rickard, he didn't actually apologize for what he said. "He said he knew for a fact we were alcoholics and drug addicts. He doesn't know me. He's apologizing to make himself to look better. Yeah, he's contrite — because he's getting so much flack from everyone."

Residents of the community near Gold Beach were illegally sprayed by a chemical aerial applicator almost two years ago and Steve Owens, of Pacific Air Research, was found guilty of obstructing the state investigation and lying about the work he did.

Owen and the Oregon Department of Agriculture — which regulates and investigates chemical applications — settled "out of administrative hearing" to a one-year suspension of his personal pesticides license. His business license will likewise be suspended for one year. There was no fine.

The residents fell victim to symptoms ranging from dizziness to skin burns; a dog lost so much weight it had to be euthanized and a horse was said to have gone blind.

In a Senate meeting earlier this year, Kruse said the 2,4-D and triclopyr could not have caused the illnesses the residents claimed.

"Those people of the South Coast who complained," Kruse said, "I know for a fact that the chemicals sprayed could, in no way, shape or form, could have caused the reactions they (said they) caused.

"I also know — that's my district — those people have a long history of substances and adult beverages that might have contributed to it," he added. "The two chemicals sprayed did not cause the reactions they have, could not have killed their dogs. They were herbicides; I know this for an absolute fact."

Laboratory analysis showed the chemicals included Triclopyr, an endocrine disruptor found in Round-Up, and 2,4-D, an herbicide found in Agent Orange, a chemical used in Vietnam to kill vegetation and expose the enemy. Decades and generations later, that chemical has been found to have caused numerous varieties of cancer and birth defects, among other ailments.

Not an apology?

Outraged residents first wanted Kruse to apologize on the Senate floor, where he delivered his statement. But the legislative session ended shortly thereafter, precluding that option.

In lieu of that, said Rickard, whose forearm was severely blistered during the spraying, a personal letter to each resident might have mitigated the feelings people have right now.

Kruse's press secretary said personal emails were sent last Monday to those who emailed the senator, as well.

Kruse also emailed a letter to the Curry Coastal Pilot this week, asking that it be published. (See the entire letter on this page.)

In the email, Kruse said his comments were "completely inappropriate, but sometimes in the heat of the moment it is possible to say the wrong thing and this was one of those times. Disagreeing on issues is one thing, but it needs to be done in a respectful manner and I violated that principle."

He continued in the email to defend the use of the chemicals.

However, Rickard and others thought the apology was weak.

Kruse's email continues to say that after working 50 years as a farmer he "might actually have a knowledge base on the subject," and that studies can show whatever a person seeks.

"Even the EPA and the Oregon Health Authority knows there are dangers inherent in these chemicals," Rickard said. "Many, many articles have established that 2,4-D is a carcinogen, that it causes birth defects. It is established that it causes dizziness, sick stomachs, sinus problems —for him to say he knows for a fact these chemicals are harmless is a crock."

Kruse further blasted Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics, a nonprofit organization that works to protect people, wildlife and waterways from chemical exposures.

"I would suggest, however, that extreme groups like Beyond Toxics tend to be driven by a purely political agenda," Kruse wrote. "For example, continuing to bring up Agent Orange is really nothing but a misdirection."

Beyond Toxics CEO Lisa Arkin laughed at that statement when interviewed this week.

"Ridiculous. Beyond Toxics matches the scientific findings of federal agencies; we are not a political organization," she said. "We are a fact-based organization, involved in positive policy change."

She noted that one element missing from Kruse's apology was his admission that his statement that the chemicals are harmless.

"That's a completely inaccurate statement," Arkin said. "It's not based on science. All the major science and health organizations in the world realize herbicides can be harmful to humans. WHO (World Health Organization) just decided that glyphosate, in Round-up, probably causes cancer. (What Kruse said is) 180 degrees from scientific accuracy and truth."

John Burns, who with his wife, Barb, was sprayed that day, agreed.

"Their whole goal is to educate people," he said of Beyond Toxics. "It's to stop the wrong that is happening."

Another point they're trying to get across is the increased toxicity of chemicals that are mixed together.

The typical gardener cannot go to the lawn center and purchase triclopyr in the concentrations used in

commercial applications. And when it's mixed with other chemicals — especially chlorine, as Owens' mixture was — the results produce many of the ill effects the residents experienced.

“That’s why they’re handled by licensed and registered applicators,” Burns said. “Even to get your hands on one is bad enough. ... When they start mixing them together, with agitants and surfactants and everything else they want to put in them. ... To say that’s harmless, that’s b.s.”

The battle continues

Arkin said several other elected officials in the state remain interested in the issue; she expects it to be brought up in the next legislative session.

“This will come back,” she said. “It’s very much tied into ... a number of federal agencies have declared that Oregon does not comply with water standards in coastal areas. There are not enough protections on aerial spraying — that’s what the federal government said. “Oregon is the only state ever found out of compliance. The federal agencies told Oregon to step up to the standards of other Northwest states and protect all surface water.”

Until then, the federal EPA is withholding millions of dollars to the state until it complies.

Cedar Valley residents have said it’s hard to help legislators understand the issue when they have big-monied industry lobbyists bending their ears.

“I’ve just felt our state agencies have not supported us at all,” Rickard said. “They’re more for the sprayers, the timber (industries). The statements they’ve made just go right along with it. It shows their mindset: that we’re small people and don’t really matter and they are doing everything they can to brush us under the rug so nobody sees it.

“If everybody saw it, knew what was going on, or if it was happening to them. ...” she continued. “If we rose up and said ‘enough,’ I’d guarantee we’d get changes.”

She also plans to write the OHA and ask them to request the President of the Senate read the health agency’s take on 2,4-D and triclopyr and its dangers to humans and animals.

“These chemicals are regulated for a reason — they’re supposed to be heavily regulated,” Rickard said. “For him to say they’re perfectly harmless is a very inaccurate description. If Sen. Kruse had really wanted to apologize, he could’ve retracted his comments.

“And he should’ve written a personal apology to all the people he offended,” she continued. “I haven’t received a letter. He’s done nothing. He’s just covering his political butt.”

Burns hasn’t checked nearby creeks for fingerlings lately, but the couple has seen fawns — with nice coats, Barb interjected — grazing in the back.

“And we’re starting to hear frogs again,” he said. “That’s a good start.”

Sen. Kruse issues public apology

I first of all want to apologize to the people in Cedar Valley. What I said on the floor of the Senate was completely inappropriate, but sometimes in the heat of the moment it is possible to say the wrong thing and

this was one of those times. Disagreeing on issues is one thing, but it needs to be done in a respectful manner and I violated that principle.

To the issue of spraying and buffers, I think HB 3549 is a very positive step in the right direction. To say I am ignorant on the issue ignores the fact I have been dealing with herbicides on my farm for over 50 years and might actually have a knowledge base on the subject. One can find all sorts of “studies” on any subject there is and probably find one to support a position on either side of an issue. I would suggest, however, that extreme groups like Beyond Toxics tend to be driven by a purely political agenda. For example, continuing to bring up Agent Orange is really nothing but a misdirection.

While I would have liked to have seen stricter penalties on the applicator in question, that is under the jurisdiction of the executive branch. Our job was to set in place more defined buffers and a better notification system, which I think we accomplished. Clearly the timber industry is very important to the economy of Curry County and they need to have the ability for proper management of the resource while trying to prevent the 2013 event from happening again.

Once again I want to apologize to those I offended. We will continue to monitor the situation and look for ways to continue to improve the system.

Sincerely,

Senator Jeff Kruse



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