

# Green Chemicals

## Learning from Green's History

5/28/2009

***By Doris De Guzman***

Speaking of history, have you ever wondered how the green movement came to being? An article from ICIS Chemical Business (the magazine I work for) examined the rise of green consciousness during the 1960s triggered by Rachel Carson's 1962 bestselling book *Silent Spring*.

The book documented the effect of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) on wildlife, particularly birds, and also attacked the way in which the claims made by the chemical industry were accepted uncritically by public officials.

1972 saw the first international conference on the environment convened by the United Nations in Stockholm, Sweden, while in the 1980s saw increased in community-based organizations.

The 1990s saw a switch in chemical safety thinking and regulation from local or national, to international scope.

Another interesting history (shamelessly promoting my materials as usual), is the green blogger's article on the history of fats and oils and how their use in chemicals is once again being developed.

Back in the mid-1850s, marine oils (whale oil and sperm whale oil in particular) were at the top of their peaks as raw materials for burning oil and lubricants for machineries. These applications along with the use of animal fats (tallow) for candles, were replaced by petroleum oil in the late 1800s.

The golden age of fats and oils was around 1935 to 1940 when development for their use for industrial applications soared. An interesting history tidbit was during World War II when housewives collect used cooking fats and sold them to local meat dealers for use in explosives and artillery.

One pound of fat was said to contain enough glycerin to make a pound of black powder, enough for six 75mm shells.

While writing this article, one major thought occurred to me. Without the rise of petroleum industry in the late 1800s, those poor marine animals especially whales and walrus would probably be extinct by now!

Last but not the least is this article from the Huffington Post analyzing the current outcries and predicted doomsday scenarios coming from anti-climate change policies (especially the auto industry back then).

According to Donald Cohen and Peter Dreier of the Center on Policy Initiatives, history had seen that despite fear mongering from industry resisters and lobbyists, enacted policies targeting reduced pollution and stronger environmental standards had been successful and did not produce tremendous loss to the industry and community that were anticipated.

Here's what the newly installed EPA administrator Lisa Jackson has to say for those who cried Wolf:

“If you look at the history of environmental laws in this country, “ she explained, “every time ... the lobbyists say, ‘Oh, this will shut down the American economy. Every last one of you will lose jobs.’ It's always these overblown, doomsday scenarios that overlook ... the fact that you can indeed build an economy towards green energy.”