

EARTH DAY 1991

Naturalist: chemicals killing our environment

by Bill Cushing
CENTRAL FLORIDA FUTURE

As the UCF Environmental Society continued its Earth Day '91 Speaker Series, the theme of individual action did also.

Before an audience of 40 or more people, Cindy Westra spoke on the domino effects of toxins. Westra, a naturalist who operates a wildlife animal shelter off Colonial Drive, gave a passionate talk as she showed slides of her work with toxin-infected animals she has worked with.

Some of the toxin effects shown by these animals include: paralysis, blindness, lethargy, convulsions and death.

During her presentation, she introduced some of the animals she cares for, including a Harris hawk, an Eastern screech owl, a skunk, a Sherman's fox squirrel, a grey-horned owl and a 12-foot, 200-pound Burmese python.

Westra said, "The food chain contamination is now the most serious problem we face."

It is a problem that lent itself to her topic of the evening, "Domino Effect: Toxins vs. Wildlife and Environment."

After all, Westra pointed out, she suffers from a less effective immune system after she was exposed to contaminants while researching wildlife in areas saturated with chemical wastes.

Other effects of toxin consumption are: heart problems, strokes, sudden infant deaths and high blood pressure.

Westra asked those present to write to their state and national representatives.

She explained how the Government Accounting Office recently

discovered that nearly 60 percent of the information issued by the Environmental Protection Agency on chemical pesticides and disinfectants is outdated and inaccurate.

"The food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink — it's all contaminated."

- Cindy Westra
Naturalist

"The Reagan administration dismantled the EPA's administrative power," she said, adding that many of the laws recently written concerning the environment have been influenced by industry lobbyists. "We are all expendable; what it all boils down to is the dollar."

Calling our state's water supplies a "chemical arsenal," Westra asked, "If we're being warned not to eat fish, who's going to test the fish [we catch]?"

In another point related to Tim McConnell's (Greenpeace), Westra described the current plight of the Florida panther. The panther is threatened by Mercury poisoning because it feeds on raccoons, animals that are eating Mercury-poisoned fish in the Everglades.

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Cindy Westra, who operates a wildlife shelter, shows the audience an injured owl she cares for.

water we drink — it's all contaminated," she said. "We have to start thinking about the chemical soup we're creating. Incineration is not the answer; tighter controls are."

She said pesticides, insecticides and herbicides mean two things: "Genocide and suicide."