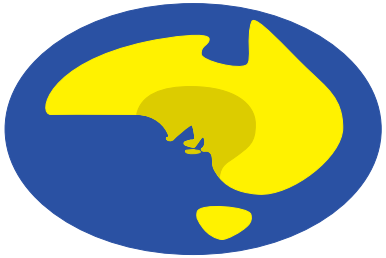

The Skeptics SA guide to

Dihydrogen monoxide

In this complex modern world it is often easy to be confused by claims that sound authoritative, especially when they have an apparently 'scientific' basis.

Unfortunately, when some individual or a group wishes to promote their particular point of view they will often tell outright lies about their beliefs, or else they will present their 'evidence' in such a way that it is biased in their favour. This approach is quite common when promoting pseudo-scientific claims, such as for alternative health systems.

The following article illustrates how easy it is to influence people's opinions to take what is a very ordinary, natural substance, one that we use with complete safety every day, and present it in such a way that it appears as a dangerous substance. Indeed, so menacing and destructive does this substance appear that when asked, most people wanted to ban this substance.

What was this 'lethal' substance? Read on and decide for yourself:

Dihydrogen monoxide: the invisible killer

Dihydrogen monoxide (DHMO) is colourless, odourless, tasteless, and kills uncounted thousands of people every year. Most of these deaths are caused by accidental inhalation of DHMO, but the dangers of DHMO do not end there. Prolonged exposure to its solid form causes severe tissue damage.

Symptoms of DHMO ingestion can include excessive sweating and elimination, possibly a bloated feeling, nausea, vomiting and severe electrolyte imbalance. For people who are dependent, DHMO withdrawal means certain death.

DHMO:

- is a major component of acid rain
- contributes to the greenhouse effect
- can cause severe burns
- contributes to the erosion of the natural landscape
- accelerates corrosion and rust in many metals
- can cause electrical failures and decreased effectiveness of automobile brakes
- has been found in excised tumours of terminal cancer patients

Contamination is reaching epidemic proportions. Non-specific quantities of dihydrogen monoxide now exist in every stream, lake, and reservoir in America, and even in Antarctic ice.

DHMO causes millions of dollars of property damage throughout the world, most recently in south-east Wisconsin.

Despite the known dangers, dihydrogen monoxide is regularly used:

- as an industrial solvent and coolant
- in nuclear power plants
- as a fire retardant
- in animal research
- in the distribution of pesticides
- as an ingredient in particular junk foods

Even after being washed thoroughly, fruit and vegetables remain contaminated by this chemical. Companies dump waste DHMO into rivers and oceans, and nothing can be done to stop them because this practice is still legal.

The impact on wildlife is extreme, yet the American government will not even consider placing a ban on the production, distribution, and use of this chemical, due to its 'importance to the economic health of the nation.'

The defence forces, military organisations, and the navy in particular, have a vested interest in

conducting ongoing experiments with DHMO, and have designed multi-billion dollar devices programs in order to utilise the substance in warfare situations. Military research facilities receive DMHO via a highly sophisticated underground distribution network. Many store large quantities for later use. To what eventual purpose?

Nathan Zohner, a 14 year-old student at Eagle Rock Junior High won first prize at the Greater Idaho Science Fair for this project on 26 April 1997. The title of his winning project was 'How gullible are we?'

He was attempting to show how conditioned the public has become to alarmists practicing pseudo-science and spreading fear of practically everything that exists in the environment. As part of the project, he urged people to sign a petition demanding strict control or total elimination of the chemical 'Dihydrogen monoxide.'

The student asked 50 people if they supported a ban of the chemical. Forty three answered 'Yes.' Six were undecided. Only one person knew that dihydrogen monoxide was actually H_2O, or in normal, non-scientific terminology: water!

This article serves to illustrate how easily one can be deceived when, either through a basic lack of knowledge, or by deliberately distorting the facts, it is possible to deceive people about what you are actually presenting.

In this example advantage was taken of the fact that most people would not realize that dihydrogen monoxide was in fact just another term for water.

One can find many examples of such deceptive practices. Two examples are:

> 'This bottled water is the same water that Marco Polo took with him on his journey to China'. (Man selling imported Italian bottled water, at $12 per bottle).

He does not mention that even if, in the unlikely event this was true, Marco would have only gone about thirty kilometres before having to fill his containers from the next well.

> 'In 1966, when the major planets are aligned together on one side of the sun, the Earth will experience major earthquakes and huge tidal waves. The Earth will be literally ripped apart'.

These claims were made by the author of The *Jupiter Effect,* in promoting his book. He conveniently did not mention that such planetary alignments have been occurring regularly; minor alignments occur several times each century, while major alignments, (when the major plants are all located within an arc of 12 degrees) every few hundred years. As this has been taking place for billions of years, without any danger to the Earth, it seemed unlikely that anything disastrous would occur in 1966.

So remember, always be aware of the facts.

Whenever someone makes extraordinary claims about something they are promoting, whether it be a particular religion, alternative medicine, or even something as simple as a household cleaner, ask them what proof they have to support their claims.

If you are uncertain, or lack the necessary knowledge to refute their claims, contact someone who does have the expertise.

Never accept any claims on face value; after all, people selling a product, whatever it might be, usually have a vested interest.

A good place to start your enquiry is the Skeptics dictionary which deals with most aspects of pseudoscience and spurious claims.

Skeptics SA

The South Australian branch of the Australian Skeptics

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