

CHEMICAL HAZARDS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

ROBER T B. AMIDON

Robert B. Amidon is an attorney in Los Angeles, California, specializing in commercial litigation. While with the U.S. Department of Justice he prosecuted criminal and environmental matters. He is also a commander in the U.S. Naval Reserves and a specialist in naval intelligence.

"My physical and emotional health had deteriorated greatly," explained the officer. "I had never felt this bad in my life. I had severe headaches. They were so bad that just the vibration of a person's voice would upset me. I felt sick and worn out all the time. I would start a fight with somebody over absolutely nothing. My wife and others started saying that I was acting like a crazy man, and I thought I was about to go crazy. I eventually didn't wear my gun as I was afraid of what I might do."

These words were spoken by a retired California peace officer after more than 20 years of service to the community. Leonard Villahermosa was discussing his state of health after being involved in the dismantling of nearly a dozen illicit PCP laboratories from mid-1977 to December 1980.

"Very little was known about PCP in 1977," says Villahermosa. "We handled the drug regularly and got it on our hands and clothes. When dismantling a PCP laboratory we would generally be in and out of the lab for four or five hours. The fumes from the chemicals were in the air, and you could smell them and actually see the fumes.

"My other colleagues in our office also started having similar behavioral problems and headaches. They used to call me the 'Medicine Man' because I had one desk drawer filled with aspirins and other medicines, and the other officers having problems would obtain medicine from me."

THE CHEMICAL ENVIRONMENT

While Villahermosa's symptoms were serious, they were, and are, not unique among law enforcement officers. We live in a chemical environment, to state the obvious. The police officer himself becomes routinely involved in assignments which can cause him to be exposed to a vast array of deadly toxins.

Considering the extent to which modern society is chemically oriented, this is not surprising. Apart from the over 50,000 chemicals in commercial use now, hundreds of illicit drugs on the street are eroding the future of their users and provide the physical, emotional and economic underpinnings of widespread criminal activity.

A downed utility pole emitting PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls, a ubiquitous electrical cooling and lubricating agent); a crazed junkie wielding a baby bottle of liquid PCP; a blazing hotel fire; a highway or railway chemical spill; or, an illicit drug laboratory are all illustrations wherein chemical exposure is likely to occur.

When a serious exposure occurs it affects the health of the officers involved and the productivity of a given police unit. In turn, California residents suffer both in terms of potential loss (temporary or permanent) of police services and quality as well as financially, because taxpayers fund workers' compensation, disability pensions, and programs to train new officers to replace disabled personnel. The dollars involved are far from negligible.

"The costs related to a Los Angeles police officer being on full disability are estimated to be about \$770,000 dollars per officer," according to Lieutenant Ed Gagnon of the Los Angeles Police Department's Medical Liaison Unit. "Individuals who go on full disability usually have an average of 13 years experience, so these types of disabilities represent a tremendous loss of expertise and service to the community as well."

According to Lieutenant Gagnon, there is at present one former LAPD officer on full disability stemming from a chemical exposure, and two more have applied for full disability. Statewide figures are higher and estimated to represent a potential financial burden to California taxpayers of several million dollars.

CHEMICAL EXPOSURE

Exposure to chemical substances may cause only temporary symptoms. Acute effects, however, including death, are generally brought about by chemicals which may nonetheless be readily eliminated by the body through natural or artificial processes.

What should be of enormous concern to law enforcement are those "exposure" situations which bring about chronic, adverse health effects, particularly when the body is unable to fully eliminate the harmful chemicals. The body stores chemicals in the fat — and rarely releases them except when the body undergoes a physical change. (Note: there is no such thing as a fat "cell." Fat is simply a chemical substance and a component of many parts of the body.)

The storage of toxic materials in the fat affects our nervous system because the nervous system (including the brain) contains a high fat content and so does virtually every other organ in the body. Yet, fat-stored toxins do not permanently remain in the fat. During times of stress (including illness or periods without food), chemicals move out of fat storage and into the bloodstream. Thus, vital organs will at least be exposed to low levels of toxic chemicals.

Few professions are as stressful as law enforcement is, and at those times when an officer is under stress he does not need to experience elevated blood levels of toxic chemicals — and the major or minor symptoms attendant therewith: headaches, irritability, memory loss, impaired sensory perception and impaired reaction time to name a few. In life-threatening situations, these disorders if present could, indeed, mark the difference between life and death.

LOW LEVEL TOXICITY

Everyday chemical exposure could also impair the health of administrative law enforcement personnel as well, in extremely subtle ways which have in the past baffled physicians and have exasperated police administrators for years. Welcome to the "Twilight Zone" of everyday ailments — low level toxic bio-accumulation. The manifestations are well known to all of us:

headaches, nausea, memory problems, concentration lapses, sensory perception anomalies, muscle twitches, apparent disease-proneness, and fatigue to again name a few.

"There is just an awful lot of stuff out there now — in the land, air, water and food," said Dr. David Katzin, a Los Angeles specialist in chemically-related illnesses. Exposure is unavoidable, and low levels of many of these chemicals gradually accumulate in the body, a process known in the medical and health-related community as toxic bio-accumulation.

"In my practice, I see people with general constitutional complaints and problems, which, while not serious, significantly affect their work proficiency and hence their personal lives. They suffer from headaches, clouded thought, digestive problems and so forth. Mere laboratory workups do not reveal much at this stage. Very often, these people end up seeing, needlessly, a psychiatrist or psychologist for some period of time. Few such cases respond. Afterwards, they still complain of a large number of vague symptoms which are difficult to deal with and treat by any traditional and conventional medical plan. At that point I begin to think: toxic exposure."

One of the more worrisome problems related to low-level chemical contamination is the effect of prolonged chemical accumulation on the human immune system. It is this system which defends the body against the "invasion" of foreign and potentially harmful substances, including both microorganisms (viruses, bacterial) and toxic materials. It plays the vital role in the healing and rejuvenation of the body. The immune system routinely protects us against serious harm from most ailments, from the common cold to more serious diseases.

A growing number of scientists and physicians have strongly concluded that the gradual accumulation of toxin residues in the body will eventually bring about a weakening of this immune system. Supported by evidence recently discovered by researchers studying the effects of PCP on the human immune system at the Medical University of South Carolina [reported in "Science magazine (July 6, 1984)], scientists have revealed that PCP not only triggers mental disturbances, it suppresses the immune system.

The long term effects of chemical exposure are, and will continue to be, insidious. Generally speaking, persons exposed to low-levels of toxic chemicals (who experience difficulties related thereto) often deceive themselves, explaining away their condition by citing some superficial rationale.

When illnesses are widespread, frequent and lengthy, people say "There's a flu going around." If staff on occasion feel defeated by their own lack of mental acuity and concentration lapses, they can feel consoled by the certainty that they're doing "the best they can." When executives, in turn, become frustrated because work appears to be too time-consuming, or when they themselves become lethargic and seemingly ensnared by their own muddled thought, then it is conveniently described as "job stress." As everyone knows, "mistakes do occur from time to time."

While stored chemicals are not the cause of all human frailties, they play a more significant role than has been hitherto recognized.

HUBBARD METHOD

In an effort to more thoroughly understand chemically related health maladies, which are costing society a dear price, scientists in recent years have begun to focus on human detoxification techniques as a principal way to resolve common health problems. A breakthrough in this field now appears to offer considerable hope for chemically disabled

officers and for those who have become chemically dependent on massive doses of medicines, drugs and antibiotics for but fleeting relief.

Over the past few years, private research firms working in cooperation with government scientists in studying the Hubbard method of detoxification have concluded that the pioneering efforts of its developer, author and researcher L. Ron Hubbard, were in fact valid. While the technique has been widely acclaimed as a result of its use by Narconon, an international drug rehabilitation program, only in recent years have environmental scientists documented its effectiveness as a means of coming to grips with the myriad of chemical exposure-related problems now facing modern society.

Why is the Hubbard method so effective? Dr. David Schnare, a senior environmental scientist with the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, so appropriately commented:

"In order to effectively reduce body burdens of toxic chemicals accumulated and stored in the body one must accomplish two essential tasks. First, you have to get the chemical burden out of the fat and into the bloodstream. Once you have mobilized the chemicals into the bloodstream you have to rapidly get them out of the body, or else they will simply move back into the fat tissues. There are many ways of getting chemicals out of the fat - fasting, strenuous exercise, and sauna baths. But these techniques, sometimes radical in approach, do not, in and of themselves, bring about a significant elimination of toxins from the body.

"On the other hand, the Hubbard method, which is carried out under close medical supervision, accomplishes both of these tasks safely and effectively. And it accomplishes them rather quickly by greatly enhancing the natural elimination pathways of the body while ensuring that chemical and mineral imbalances in the body do not occur. An added advantage to the program is that it does not require severe diet or life-style changes."

Individuals deciding whether or not to undergo the regimen frequently ask if it would not be best to "leave well enough alone," that is, to leave chemical toxins stored away in the fat.

"This point might be justified were it not for two factors," stated Dr. David Root, an occupational health expert and medical director of Sacramento HealthMed Clinic, which specializes in delivering the Hubbard method. "For one thing, these chemicals do not stay in the fat. Periods of stress or illness can mobilize them into the bloodstream. Thus, any organ requiring blood and oxygen will be continually re-exposed. Furthermore, almost every cell in the body has a fat component, so the fat storage is not confined to the 'extra tire' around the stomach."

The Hubbard Method consists of the following:

- a) aerobic exercise;
- b) 2 to 5 hours, daily, of low heat sauna (with periodic breaks) and water and salts taken as needed to avoid dehydration or over-heating;
- c) oil supplements, to assist the body in releasing toxins from fatty tissue; and
- d) vitamin and mineral supplements tailored to each individual, and gradually increasing doses of Niacin (Vitamin B₃) to further promote the release of toxins from fat tissues.

The program length varies from person to person, but averages two-to-three weeks.

Research and testing, using the Hubbard Method, has so far verified that this technique successfully and safely lowers levels of hazardous chemicals which otherwise would remain in the body fat for decades if not for life.

CLINICAL OBSERVATIONS

Statements by those who have undergone detoxification, both from the vantage point of those seriously exposed and those with low-level exposures, suggest that a deep level of cleansing takes place. So-called "flashbacks," the re-experiencing of mental and physiological phenomena associated with a prior chemical exposure, are commonly reported to medical supervisors when toxins, dislodged from the fat into the bloodstream, are finally eliminated from the body.

"As I was sitting in the sauna I suddenly felt like I was floating," stated Michael Del Puppo, a narcotics officer who had liquid PCP deliberately thrown into his face four years ago (a favorite practice of illicit laboratory operators seeking to disable and escape from officers). "The walls were moving in on me. When the horribly bitter taste of PCP started coming out in my mouth again I felt sure that the program was actually getting the stuff out of my body. No other treatment had done that."

RESULTS

Among those who have completed the program in the past two years are individuals who have expressed their relief from a variety of exposure-related problems, such as the healing of open sores on those who were exposed to the Vietnam defoliant, Agent Orange; relief from emotional problems after prolonged use of narcotics; and, the alleviation of radiation sickness suffered by a serviceman involved in atomic bomb tests.

Police officers who have availed themselves of the program (covered by Workmen's Compensation insurance) have reported remarkable success. Leonard Villahermosa, after completing the program in August 1983, said:

"While I was in the sauna I actually began to taste the PCP in my mouth. I could also smell it about my body. After about a week things started to change; it caught me by surprise. I had been having headaches every day for a very long time and suddenly one day I realized that I didn't have a headache anymore. After that I just kept getting better and better. Toward the end of the program I felt great.

"After completing the program I took another series of tests. The personality test score, IQ test score and reaction time test score all- showed my improvement. After talking with a cousin, he said, 'You sure do sound different. You must feel pretty good.' Everyone, since that time, has said the same thing and they still are saying it."

Others completing the program have experienced similar results. Almost all have reported having a heightened sense of well being, increased clarity of thought, more energy, and an improved state of general health.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to inform those within the law enforcement community, including their families, that while serious exposure to chemicals can be and has been successfully treated, low levels of chemical exposure over time can and should also be diagnosed and treated quickly in order that more serious, debilitating health problems do not occur, affecting the emotional and physical well-being of the officer and, ultimately, the family.

The conclusions which should be expressly understood from this article are:

1. Problems caused by serious body burdens of toxic chemicals may now be treated.
2. Problems associated with low level chemical contamination can also be alleviated.

3. The government and some private businesses are concerned, as taxpayers should be, about maintaining the health of the nation's work force and all of its citizens.

4. The Hubbard Method works.

One burden with which law enforcement personnel should not have to bear is a chemical body burden. As Detective Del Puppo so appropriately commented: "Officers are doing their communities a tremendous service. Their reward shouldn't be chronic health problems. Toxic contamination problems can and should be addressed by the law enforcement community. Hopefully these individuals and those in other demanding professions will seek out the help which is now finally available."