



Mainstream America considers chemtrails another crazy conspiracy theory, but activists in the Bay Area say the effects are real — and deadly

BY JEREMY LYBARGER

“If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don’t have to worry about answers.”
— Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*

PART I: WARRIORS FOR THE DEEP BLUE SKY

Patrick Roddie films the sky every day. Two years ago, he rigged a camera on the roof of his apartment building in Lower Pacific Heights to record timelapses of the sun’s dawn-to-dusk arc, along with the sky’s usual bland traffic of birds, airplanes, and clouds.

Many of Roddie’s timelapses — which he uploads to YouTube — capture something else, too: hazy, white threads that thicken in the wake of airplanes and sometimes tattoo the sky in grids. To the uninitiated, these are contrails, the harmless water vapor that commercial planes spume as they track across the sky at 30,000 feet. To Roddie and his followers, however, these are chemtrails, the toxic signature of a covert government program to slow global warming and control the weather.

Roddie knows this sounds like boilerplate conspiracy theory. “Don’t trust me,” he says. “Assume I’m full of crap. I’m just some Irish guy.”

Roddie, who was born in Belfast, has the beard of a Confederate general and the doggedness of a street preacher. His day job is photographing portraits, mostly of weddings and children (he also has a Burning Man portfolio dating back to 1998), but his passion is cataloging and protesting “the global chemtrails program.”

Roddie runs a website, Stop Spraying Us - SF, helps admin a Facebook group called California - Bay Area Residents Against Chemtrails/Geoengineering that has more than 2,000 members, manages a YouTube account that’s 200 videos strong (with most view counts in the low hundreds), leads small monthly rallies at City Hall and the Ferry Building, and travels widely to speak out against chemtrails. Roddie estimates that over the course of his three-year chemtrails activism career he’s burned and distributed more than 30,000 informational DVDs.

Last month, he raised \$5,000 on GoFundMe to fly to Paris, where he presented a paper to climate scientists about the health effects of geoengineering. And this month, he addressed a public Environmental Protection Agency hearing in Washington about the dangers of aircraft pollution.

If you ask him the million-dollar question — Why are they spraying chemtrails? — his stock answer is: “Because they’re assholes.”

“They” could refer to several nefarious actors: the U.S. government, the military-industrial complex, renegade scientists, old-money foundations, the U.N., or, most sinister and enigmatic of all, the New World Order. “It’s a huge program,” Roddie says, adding that “it” probably encompasses every airline in the world.

A thumbnail sketch of the science behind chemtrails is difficult because there are competing theories about what that science entails. But most activists, including Roddie, agree that curbing global warming seems to be the purpose. In layman’s terms, chemtrails are believed to be an aerosol that contains aluminum (which deflects sunlight), as well as a cocktail of other toxic elements such as barium and strontium. According to Roddie, this aerosol has insidious side effects, including Alzheimer’s, autism, asthma, respiratory failure, pulmonary failure, and stroke.

Another major side effect: California’s historic drought.

“It’s like putting a Brawny towel over the sky,” Roddie says. “Any time there’s a storm approaching the California coast and you look on NASA’s EOSDIS Worldview satellite, you can see a checkerboard of lines ahead of and on top of any storm coming in.”

Mainstream scientists reject the “chemtrails conspiracy” — if they entertain it at all. Ken Caldeira, a climate scientist at the Carnegie Institute for Science at Stanford University who studies climate change, is barraged with chemtrails inquiries so often that he created a pro forma response. “Please do not be one of these people with no scientific literacy and who believe stupid stuff they read on the Internet,” reads a sample line.

“I feel sorry for these people because they have no real way of finding out the truth for themselves. They trust people who believe false things,” Caldeira says.

R. John Hansman, Professor of Aeronautics & Astronautics at MIT, offers a no-nonsense definition of those lines in the sky: “[They] are primarily water and are due to condensation of the jet exhaust when the relative humidity is high in the upper atmosphere.”

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And the U.S. Air Force has also publicly denied the existence of a chemtrails program. In the early aughts, the agency's website featured a notice declaring, "The Air Force is not conducting any weather modification experiments or programs and has no plans to do so in the future. The 'chemtrail' hoax has been investigated and refuted by many established and accredited universities, scientific organizations, and major media publications."

Nonetheless, Roddie has attracted a following of devout chemtrails believers in the Bay Area. Fifty-three-year old Val Hall is one of them. A landscape gardener from Richmond, Hall first learned of chemtrails from a young man who'd joined her work crew at a job in Point Richmond in May 2006.

"While we were working, a jet put a persistent contrail all the way across the sky, and the kid showed me," Hall says. "I'd never seen a jet put a line like that all the way across the sky in my life. Some of my crewmembers looked at him and thought, 'This guy's crazy,' but I didn't think he was crazy."

The kid gave Hall a name for what she'd witnessed — chemtrails — and explained the various poisons strafing people in the Bay Area. Hall never saw the kid again after that day, but she began watching the sky closely, and in 2011 she went online to do her own research. That's when she found Roddie.

"I never wanted to be an activist in my life, but all of a sudden I *had* to be an activist," Hall says. She calls herself a "warrior for the deep blue sky," an allusion to her childhood in the Bay Area when the sky was a lush, cinematic blue instead of the "chalkboard" it is today. Hall now admins 15 different Facebook groups devoted to exposing chemtrails.

She's a valuable activist partly because she claims to suffer health effects as a result of chemtrails. Hall has Lyme Disease, for example, which she says worsens on heavy spray days. (A 2007 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* disputed the existence of chronic Lyme Disease and concluded that such a diagnosis "is a misnomer, and the use of prolonged, dangerous, and expensive antibiotic treatments for it is not warranted.")

Hall says she protects herself as best she can, but as a gardener, she works outside every day and is vulnerable. She no longer drives with her windows down, she says, and she bought a water filter to sift out impurities. Occasionally, she detoxes from the heavy metals in her blood by taking supplements such as chlorella, zeolite powder, and bentonite clay. She also eats as much cilantro as she can, which assuages metallic contamination, she claims.

Rumors of sickness and bodily mutation run rampant through the chemtrails community. Hall mentions a fellow activist who tested her dog's blood for heavy metals and discovered thorium, a radioactive element that has been used as nuclear fuel.

She also mentions Morgellons, a controversial condition — classified by most physicians as a delusional parasitosis — in which people develop sores they believe to be caused by parasites, insects, or invasive synthetic fibers. In 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investigated Morgellons among patients in Northern California, a hotbed of self-reported Morgellons diagnoses, and concluded there was "no infectious cause and no evidence of an environmental link."

Hall is unconvinced. "All of us have fibers in us because they spray them in the sky, and they're all over the ground, and they're in the soil, and they're in the water," she says. "These fibers are self-replicating nanotech-

nology. To me, those are the scariest words I've ever heard in my life."

Marsha Dawson, a North Bay activist who works with Roddie and Hall, agrees that chemtrails exact a disastrous human toll. She says she experiences "memory problems" and lung pain because of her exposure. Dawson drinks Fiji and Volvic water constantly because both contain silica that, she claims, loosens the aluminum particles in her body. She also finds relief in black cherry bark syrup from Whole Foods.

"I'll call my daughter to warn her, 'It's a heavy spray day, please don't go outside,'" Dawson says. "And she doesn't argue. She doesn't want to talk about it, but she'll say okay. She's

young, only 25, so it's hard to face this is your world."

Dawson first learned of chemtrails in February 2014. She had recently retired as an administrative assistant, and with spare time on her hands, began sitting on her deck in Marin County. One day she noticed contrails running across the sky. As Hall did three years before, Dawson turned to the Internet for answers.

"That opened a door that I wish many times I could close," Dawson says.

She joined Roddie's Facebook group. And later that month, during a trip to the San Joaquin Valley, she says she awoke in a little town to see planes spraying and chemtrails swelling like varicose veins across an ashen sky.



James Hosking



(Top) Patrick Roddie on the roof of his building in Lower Pac Heights. (Left) Roddie holds satellite imagery of contrails.

To make matters worse, Dawson believes there's a media blackout around chemtrails. The Weather Channel, she says, is owned by the same corporation that holds patents for weather control. (In reality, The Weather Channel is owned by a consortium that is itself owned by NBCUniversal, The Blackstone Group, and Mitt Romney's Bain Capital.) She notes that the *Marin Independent Journal* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* never publish stories about chemtrails.

Many activists contend that journalists who investigate the spraying program risk being blacklisted. A case in point is Marcus K. Dalton, who in August 2005 published a two-part story about chemtrails in the *Las Vegas*

Tribune. On October 21, 2005, barely two months after his story appeared, Dalton was fired, and the notice in the *Tribune* announcing his termination indicated that his wife, who sometimes contributed business articles to the paper, had also "been asked not to write anymore." All mention of Dalton and his articles has since been scrubbed from the *Tribune's* website.

High Strangeness, a blog about mysterious phenomena, posted an email purportedly sent by Dalton on November 18, 2005, in which he confirmed his dismissal was unrelated to the chemtrails story. "I moved away from Las Vegas," he wrote. But that hasn't dissuaded chemtrails believers from anointing him a martyr to their cause. (As of press time, Dalton couldn't be located, and neither his ex-wife nor the *Las Vegas Tribune* returned requests for comment.)

Roddie believes that whatever dark bureaucracy is behind the spraying program conditioned the public to accept chemtrails by foreshadowing them in pop culture. He calls this "the revelation of the method," a term popularized by the revisionist historian (and Holocaust denier) Michael A. Hoffmann. Roddie considers the body scanners in *Total Recall* an example of how the government introduces provocative technology under the guise of commercial entertainment.

"We're living in a script," Roddie says. Hall echoes him, noting, "Life seems to be like a scary science fiction movie now."

PART II: SPECIAL REPORT NO. 142

The chemtrails conspiracy sounds like an extravagant *X-Files* episode, but so does the government's history of civilian defense experiments. The most haunting local example is the Army's biological warfare trials in San Francisco in September 1950.

According to the Army's Special Report No. 142, drafted in 1951 but unpublished until the mid-1970s, the Army unleashed six "experimental biological warfare attacks" upon the Bay Area during one week in late September 1950.

As Leonard A. Cole writes in *Clouds of Secrecy: The Army's Germ Warfare Tests Over Populated Areas*, the tests consisted of "generating bacterial aerosols from a ship located at various distances offshore." The two bacterial aerosols deployed — *Bacillus globigii* and *Serratia marcescens* — were considered nonpathogenic, so the Army didn't bother to notify San Franciscans that their city was being treated as a Petri dish in the name of national security.

Cole notes that everybody in San Francisco during that week in September 1950 inhaled 5,000 airborne particles per minute. In the days after the tests, 11 people came down with mysterious infections at the Stanford Hospital in San Francisco. One of them was 75-year-old Edward J.

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Nevin, a pipefitter retired from PG&E. Nevin had been in the hospital to have his prostate removed, but in the first week of October, he developed a sudden fever. Doctors discovered *Serratia marcescens* in his urine culture.

A month later, Nevin was dead. An autopsy concluded that he'd died of bacterial endocarditis, or inflammation of the heart. And while Nevin's infection was never conclusively traced back to the Army's tests, the fact that serratia infections had never been reported at the hospital before raised suspicions.

The Army kept mum about its experiment, and it wasn't until a *Newsday* reporter uncovered Army memos in 1976 that the public learned of the secret germ tests. Nevin's family sued the U.S. government for \$11 million in 1977, arguing the Army's test was unlawful and caused Nevin's death. The family lost the trial. Judge Samuel Conti (an appointee of Richard Nixon) ruled that the Army tests were part of national planning and thus exempt from prosecution. Further, the Army had exercised caution in selecting which aerosols to disperse, Conti declared.

The legacy of the 1950 germ test — and the Nevin family's trial — resonates among contemporary chemtrails activists. Wanttoknow.info, a website that documents alleged cover-ups, features a prominent link to a 2001 *Wall Street Journal* article discussing the Nevin case. And imagery from the Army's 1950 test is recycled in new fears of government malfeasance. Val Hall, for example, claims that ships trawl the ocean between Japan and the West Coast, pumping deadly aerosols into the clouds.

"I grew up in the Bay Area, and we always had fog," Hall says, "but it's not the same fog anymore. The stuff that comes in now is gray and not very drizzly. It seems full of chemicals."

The 1950 San Francisco experiment is only one of the secret civilian tests the government conducted. In a 1977 Senate subcommittee hearing, the Army disclosed that 239 biological field tests occurred in 66 locations between 1941 and 1969. That most of these tests were top secret only strengthens activists' conviction that Washington experiments on innocent people with impunity. If the government treated us like guinea pigs before, the thinking goes, who's to say they're not doing the same now?

"We could hire a helicopter, fill it full of nerve gas, fly over wherever the Giants are playing, and gas everybody," Roddie says. "As long as we call it research, it's legal."

Roddie is referring to U.S. Code 50, which outlines war and national security protocol. Specifically, Section 2791 defines acceptable laboratory-directed research and development as "work of a creative and innovative nature" that's undertaken "for the purpose of maintaining the vitality of the laboratory in defense-related scientific disciplines."



Photographs by James Hosking



Whether that extends to spraying nerve gas over ballparks is debatable. Roddie, weaned on the cynicism of Jello Biafra and the Dead Kennedys, has a stark view of society's food chain: "The people who are most powerful will collaborate to screw everybody else over. I can't imagine another system that would work at a global level."

PART III: VIGILANTE SCIENCE

J. Marvin Herndon speaks with a crunchy Southern drawl, perhaps a relic from South Carolina where he

was born, or from his days as a Ph.D. student in nuclear chemistry at Texas A&M University. Scarcely five minutes into our phone call, he says he can't name the journal due to publish his latest chemtrails research because "there are people who listen, if you understand my drift."

In 1979, Herndon published a paper in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* in which he argued that the earth's inner core is composed of nickel silicide (most geologists believe the inner core to be an iron-nickel alloy). According to Herndon, the idea was so heretical that the scientific community wouldn't acknowledge it.

**(Top) Marsha Dawson watches the sky in San Francisco.
(Left) Dawson holds a chemtrails flyer.**

Herndon was a postdoctoral student at UC San Diego from 1975 through 1978, studying under chemist and Nobel laureate Harold Urey. Herndon claims that around the time he published his paper, the government grants funding his research dried up without explanation.

"I realized then I had to make a decision," Herndon says, "whether to stay in the academic business and howl with the wolves, or do it on my own."

Herndon went rogue, and since his self-described "excommunication" from academia, he's lurked on the fringes of accepted science. In 1993, he published a paper that theorized a giant nuclear fission reactor at the center of the earth. And last year, he self-published *Herndon's Earth and the Dark Side of Science*, a textbook-cum-manifesto revealing the "malevolent political agenda" that has hijacked science.

"Virtually every scientist thinks [Herndon's] theory is nonsense," geophysicist Gillian Foulger told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2004, referring to the idea of a nuclear reactor inside the earth.

A year and a half ago, Herndon noticed contrails above his house in San Diego. "They shouldn't have sprayed that crap over my head," he says, his drawl dropping an octave into John Wayne parody.

Herndon emailed city officials in San Diego for answers, but the only response he got was from a lieutenant in SDPD internal affairs who called to see if Herndon was "a nutcase." Herndon also contacted the *San Diego Union-Tri-*

bune and the *San Diego Reader* to no avail. Like Roddie and his followers, Herndon is convinced the media is collaborating on a chemtrails cover-up.

In June, Herndon published a chemtrails paper in a minor Indian journal called *Current Science*. In it, he argued that chemtrails are coal fly ash, the toxic waste from coal-burning power plants. Planes spray this into the troposphere, Herndon wrote, hoping metallic particles in the ash will deflect sunlight and reduce global warming.

"It's all a beautiful idea if, number one, this stuff wasn't toxic, and number two, they're weren't spraying it into the troposphere," he says.

The scope of the program Herndon envisions is mind-boggling. According to him, the fly ash is transported on railways that connect coal plants to military and civilian airports across the country. The ash is loaded onto a fleet of 1,000 or more planes, he estimates, all of which fly off-the-radar, often at night, without transponders or flight plans. These ghost planes, Herndon says, have poisoned the country and induced California's drought. He alleges that certain leafy plants in the Golden State now exhibit high concentrations of thallium — Saddam Hussein's favorite poison for political assassinations.

"It'll end up destroying the agriculture or make a lot of people sick. There'll be a lot of neurological diseases," Herndon says.

He adds, "It's also destroying something else: It's destroying democracy."

Herndon bristles at being labeled a "conspiracy theorist." Like many believers, he's wary of what he calls "the shills," secret agents on the government payroll tasked with infiltrating and undermining activist groups.

He quotes from "Countering Criticism of the Warren Commission Report," a 1967 CIA dispatch that explains how to disarm conspiracy theorists:

...our ploy should point out, as applicable, that the critics are (I) wedded to theories adopted before the evidence was in, (II) politically interested, (III) financially interested, (IV) hasty and inaccurate in their research, or (V) infatuated with their own theories.

Roddie, too, is vigilant about outing shills. His website links to a purported "shill handbook," part of which adapts COINTELPRO techniques for the Internet. (The FBI launched COINTELPRO in 1956 to subvert Communists in the U.S.; the program later expanded to include the KKK, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Black Panther Party.)

Per the handbook, one classic shill technique is topic dilution.

"By implementing continual and non-related postings that distract and disrupt (trolling) the forum readers they are more effectively stopped from anything of any real productivity," the handbook states. In other words, Reddit flame wars could actually be Big Brother trying to put the kibosh on citizen action.

Roddie claims that during ➤p18

the Iraq War, the government inundated domestic groups with undercover agents. “They had agents in knitting groups,” he says. “And they were just knitting! It wasn’t like Knitters Against the Iraq War.” (Which may not be as implausible as it sounds. Tove Herman-son, formerly of the Costume Society of America, wrote a paper in 2012 entitled “Knitting as Dissent,” which outlines knitting’s long political history.)

Herndon is unfazed by reports of government intimidation. He says he recently submitted a paper about chemtrails to a peer-reviewed journal called *Environmental Health Perspectives*, published by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. The journal rejected the paper without comment.

“I went back several times asking them for more detailed information, and, of course, they had no legitimate basis for rejecting it,” he says. He can only conclude that because NIEHS is a government agency, it can’t also be a chemtrails whistleblower.

In an email to *SF Weekly*, Jane Schroeder, interim Editor-in-Chief of *EHP*, says that “the vast majority of papers ... submitted to *EHP* are not accepted for publication, so that fact that this paper was rejected was not at all exceptional.” She adds that 70 percent of manuscripts are rejected without peer review.

Despite his distrust of government, Herndon once made a living from government contracts. His website — which recalls the Netscape era of fluorescent text and animated GIFs — lists him as President and CEO of Transdyne Corporation in San Diego. Herndon started Transdyne, a defense contracting company that provides software management services, in 1981 to “keep the wolf from the door” while doing his own research. He says he hasn’t sought government contracts since the 1980s, although he’s still registered with the government.

“Mostly, I do research and development,” he says. “Sometimes, for example, a mining company will get in trouble and I’ll take over their operations, change their technology, or fix their management to get them out of trouble.”

If Herndon is evasive about Transdyne’s relationship with the Defense Department, he’s grandiloquent about the threat chemtrails pose. He compares the spraying program to the Holocaust, both in terms of its barbarity and its ability to proceed unchecked.

But even Hitler, he says, never had the audacity to gas people with airplanes.

“Something I’ve noticed over a lifetime,” Herndon adds, “is that people have an inherent resistance to change. There’s a chemical analog to that: Le Chatelier’s Principle. If you try to change one of the components of a reaction, the reaction operates to oppose that change. Many people don’t receive new ideas very readily.”

This obstinance is why academia doesn’t take Herndon’s research seri-



Courtesy of Patrick Roddie

ously, he suggests, and why politicians in California aren’t scrambling to host townhalls about toxic spraying.

“When they can put toxic chemicals in the air we breathe, there’s no freedom,” Herndon says, sounding every bit his 71 years. “I’m worried that young people are just more interested in video games.”

PART IV: THE DISINFORMATIONIST

Mick West is a retired video game consultant in California. He’s also a shill, according to Herndon and Roddie.

West runs two blogs: Contrail Science and Metabunk. The former refutes chemtrails, while the latter refutes chemtrails, 9/11 truthers, Charlie Hebdo truthers, UFO chasers, and assorted other conspiracy theorists. West began blogging in 2007 because “debunking and skeptical investigation

[had] always been a hobby.”

He traces that hobby to a childhood infatuation with *The Unexplained*, a short-lived British magazine that investigated paranormal phenomena. As West matured, his interest shifted from strange phenomena to the pseudoscience behind them. He first learned of chemtrails while editing Wikipedia articles, another of his hobbies. Shortly after, he launched Contrail Science to highlight the overwhelming “bad evidence” buoying the chemtrails conspiracy.

“Pretty much one hundred percent of people who believe in chemtrails will believe that 9/11 was an inside job and the World Trade Center was pre-rigged with explosives,” West says. (In fact, prior to becoming a chemtrails activist, Roddie was involved in We Are Change, a “nonpartisan, independent media organization” that promotes the idea of a 9/11 cover-up.)

West’s outspoken skepticism has

City Hall on a “heavy spray day.”

earned many enemies in the chemtrails community, including Herndon, who accuses him of spreading “disinformation.” West, in turn, charges that Herndon’s research “doesn’t really say anything at all.”

“Look, he’s the best qualified scientist the chemtrails community has right now,” West concedes, “but he’s been taken in by this [chemtrails] theory. All of the scientists in the world are in on this conspiracy except one guy: Marvin Herndon. It doesn’t make sense.”

As West points out, the scope of the program that Herndon suggests would implicate every meteorologist, airline pilot, and climate scientist in the world, plus a significant chunk of the Pentagon, Congress, Cabinet, and White House — and numerous other governments and industries worldwide.

West is methodical in his refutations. First, he says, contrails have in-

creased over the last 20 years because more airlines now fly local routes rather than from hub city to hub city.

This isn’t accurate. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in July that U.S. airlines have cut the number of domestic flights nationwide. In fact, the reduction is so severe that the Justice Department is investigating whether “airlines colluded to shrink flight schedules in unison so they could boost prices.” Local routes have been hardest hit.

Still, West makes a valid point: confirmation bias is real. “People don’t notice things, don’t remember things, if they’re not paying attention to them,” he says. “If you ask people when they first noticed chemtrails, a lot of them will say it was within the last year or so.” (Herndon and Dawson both became aware of chemtrails in the last two years; Roddie has been involved in chemtrails activism for the last three.)

West’s second argument is that the DIY science behind chemtrails is bogus. The presence of aluminum and other contaminants in water and soil tests, which chemtrails believers submit as proof of toxic spraying, is normal.

“In California, soil is about ten percent aluminum,” West says. “So if you take a pound of soil, about an ounce and a half of that is going to be aluminum, in the form of aluminum oxide, so it’s like dust. The dust that’s in the air from the ground drying out and the wind blowing has a lot of aluminum in it, so when it rains you see a lot of aluminum in the rain.”

He adds, “They’re testing dirt, they’re finding stuff that’s in dirt, and they’re finding it in about the concentrations you’d expect.”

Indeed, a 2003 EPA report states that “aluminum is the most commonly occurring metallic element, comprising eight percent of the earth’s crust” and that the “typical range of aluminum in soils is from 1 percent to 30 percent.” By this measure, the presence of aluminum in rainwater, soil, or even plants would be uncontroversial — except to chemtrails believers, who think the EPA is a clearinghouse for government propaganda.

West often advises would-be chemtrails believers to seek information offline. “If you show someone an old library book that’s dogeared and stamped, then it’s more real, and people are less likely to think it’s fake,” he says.

Yet, West has been accused of printing dummy books and distributing them via secondhand markets such as eBay. He’s also been the target of personal attacks on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, some of which link him to The Illuminati, the secret cabal supposedly masterminding the world.

“There was even an article about how I’m actually a Mossad agent,” West laughs. “Somebody found one of my photos that’s got some hills in the background, which they say proves I’m from Jerusalem.”

So far, the chemtrails movement hasn’t recruited credible, mainstream spokespeople. As West says, Herndon is perhaps their leading scientific ally,



Courtesy of Patrick Roddie

but his decades-long ostracism from academia is a liability. Most other chemtrails “experts” are also estranged from whatever agency or university would lend them authority. An August 14 “chemtrails education event” in Redding, for example, featured testimony from a former California Fish and Game biologist, a former US Forest Service biologist, a former US Department of Agriculture farm specialist, a former defense industry technician, and a US Navy veteran.

“I’m constantly second guessing if I’m effective on a larger scale,” West says, “but my work doesn’t just help people get out of the rabbit hole, it helps [them] from falling into it in the first place.”

PART V: THE SCORPION AND THE FROG

Redding is an auspicious setting for a chemtrails event. Last year, Shasta County, of which Redding is the county seat, became one of the few local governments in the nation to not only hold a public hearing on chemtrails, but to unanimously approve investigating them further.

In a record turnout, more than 400 concerned citizens crammed in front of the county Board of Supervisors to hear testimony about chemtrails’ deleterious effects. One by one, activists — including an airline pilot, a neurologist, and an attorney — delivered earnest speeches about the horror unfolding above us. Rather than applaud, audience members were instructed to signal their support by waving their hands in the air, evoking a roomful of people politely drowning.

“How did Monsanto know to create aluminum-resistant plants?” an activist named Allan Buckmann asked, to appreciative nods.

At the end of the hour-long meeting, the supervisors voted to evaluate Shasta County’s current monitoring program and to forward the video-taped testimony to officials in Sacra-

A chemtrails rally at the Ferry Building.

mento and D.C. However, Supervisor Bill Schappel cautioned his colleagues against relying on federal studies.

“Any federal information will be skewed. We need a local study, then take the results to the feds and say, ‘What about this?’” he said.

Whether this represents a breakthrough for the chemtrails movement, or just a moment of fleeting paranoia among the bigwigs in rural, conservative Shasta County, remains to be seen. Roddie, Hall, Dawson, and Herndon agree that the spraying program is so vast, and the cover-up so entrenched, that progress is best measured in spoonfuls, like bitter medicine.

Watching the sky from his sixth-floor apartment in San Francisco, Roddie recites a parable that illustrates the position he and his followers are in:

Once upon a time, a frog and a scorpion sat on a riverbank, watching a grassfire burn towards them. The terrified scorpion asked the frog, “Can I hitch a ride on your back across the water?”

“No,” the frog said, “you’re a scorpion. You’ll sting me.”

“No, no, I swear I won’t,” the scorpion said. “My life is in danger.”

The frog and the scorpion haggled as the fire inched closer. Finally, feeling heat from the flames, the frog agreed to ferry the scorpion across the water. “But remember, you promised not to sting me,” he told his passenger.

They jumped into the river and swam to the other side, to safety. As soon as they made landfall, the scorpion hopped off and stung the frog.

“What did you expect?” he asked. “I’m a scorpion.”

Like the frog, Roddie and his followers just want to save people, but they feel they’re up against the scorpions of the world.

“Getting this published without making me look crazy is going to be difficult,” Roddie says, then adds, “If you see me on television, know that I’ve been gotten to.”

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