

Article taken to task - LTE Sierra Vista Herald (September 23, 2001)

Your article "SV water officials dispute reports of pesticides and water pollution" takes me to task for saying things I never said and that the original *Arizona Daily Star* article he refers to does not say I said. The story is an example of the kind of inaccurate reading, misquotation, defamation, and other aspects of sloppy reporting we used to try to teach our journalism students to avoid.

First, your reporter David Rupkalvis says that I claimed "that children in Sierra Vista are twice as likely to get leukemia." As the original article makes very clear, that claim was made by health officials and authorities, not me.

Then he says that I "claimed that the city uses pesticides on city parks, water companies in the area do not meet Arizona Department of Environmental Quality standards for chemicals in water and too much aircraft exhaust is left behind by military planes flying overhead."

Contrary to Rupkalvis' account, there is nothing at all in the original article about me having anything to say about jet exhaust, I did not make either of the other two claims, and the *Star* article doesn't have me saying any of those things. Like the assertion that the leukemia rate figure is mine, these are evidently figments of your reporter's imagination (or, I suspect, a misguided attempt to liven up the story by concocting a disagreement between me and city officials and local water companies)

Similarly, I never said anything about violation of water quality standards for chemicals or water companies not meeting them, so one wonders where (if not from Rupkalvis) city spokeswoman Marie Hanson got the idea that she had to respond to me or anyone in the original article with the assertion "that any claim that water companies did not meet state standards was blatantly false." There was no such claim by me or anyone else.

What I did refer to was self-reporting by small companies and state oversight. On this your reporter quotes Judy Gignac of Bella Vista Water saying that "no water company self-reports." This may or may not be true in the Sierra Vista area but in fact (and as Judy undoubtedly knows, and as a glance at the state code on the Net or a phone call to ADEQ drinking water section would show), owners of small water companies throughout Arizona are certified to take their own water samples, and do, and send them to the lab themselves, which then (as Judy notes) sends the results to ADEQ. Maybe Judy doesn't count self-sampling as self-reporting, but I think most people would agree it's a fine line.

Finally, I said nothing about use of pesticides in city parks, so Ms Hansen's retort that "the city does not use any pesticides on its parks or anywhere else" is a little misdirected. More to the point, that statement and her subsequent clarification that "herbicides are occasionally used to control weeds" indicates the level of chemical misinformation (or is it dis-information?) being promulgated by your reporter and city employees alike. It is common textbook knowledge (especially among the many chemically-sensitive people living here) that the city and state both routinely (not just "occasionally") spray herbicides on roadsides and other rights-of-way in

residential areas and elsewhere.