

October 14, 1985

Dr. Donald D. Runnells
Department of Geological Sciences
University of Colorado, Boulder
Campus Box 250
Boulder, Colorado 80309

Dear Dr. Runnells,

I hope you will not mind too much if I chide you a little in return. We still try to teach our graduate students to consider data which do not agree with their hypotheses. Even before that we try to teach them how to read scientific papers carefully and accurately. This is not to say, of course, that the faculty here, any more than at Colorado, get it right every time.

But you should have read our article more carefully. Nowhere in it do we say or imply that mycotoxins are a natural characteristic of bee feces. On the contrary, we present a large amount of evidence against the occurrence--natural or unnatural--of the toxins in yellow rain. In particular, we report that the U.S. Army has analysed more than 80 samples of yellow spots and powders and other materials from alleged attacks in Southeast Asia but that not one of them tested positive for the toxins. And we conclude that "...the yellow material is not harmful to people." Contrary to the impression fostered by Mr. Kucewicz of the WSJ editorial staff, we do not argue that the toxins reported in a few samples are of natural occurrence. What we do argue is that the reports themselves are not properly confirmed and are unconvincing, particularly in view of the Army's opposite results for a much larger number of samples.

Mr. Kucewicz's complaint amounts to this: We did not add our own negative results (for two samples of bee feces and 11 samples of food and other materials) to the much larger body of negative results which we did report, all of which are evidence against a conclusion we do not draw! A nice exercise in illogic.

I enclose a copy of our letter in the WSJ of October 2, responding to Mr. Kucewicz. Regarding the autopsy report on which he placed much emphasis, please see the enclosed review from the September 23 issue of Chemical and Engineering News.

Sincerely,

Matthew Meselson