

Colorful Cal professor Tyrone Hayes wins E.O. Wilson Award

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Tyrone Hayes, a biology professor at the University of California, Berkeley, won the E.O. Wilson Award for his work on how pesticides affect frogs, and, ultimately, might affect people, too.

Hayes is a colorful character on campus, and has stirred up plenty of controversy in the past, and probably will in the future, too. His neighbors in the colossal Valley Life Sciences Building once complained because Hayes and one of his students, Nigel Noriega, both exercise fanatics, were running sprints up and down the hallway outside their laboratory at all hours.

But no one questions Hayes' scientific skill or his dedication to the fight against pesticides which interfere with the development of animals and which could also hurt people. Research from Hayes' lab has shown how some pesticides mimic or interfere with normal developmental hormones. One chemical, which mimics a growth hormone, might cause frogs to grow an extra leg, for example.



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Another pesticide can cause male frogs to become female or do worse damage by “chemically castrating” them.

On Dec. 12, Hayes won the second annual E.O. Wilson Award for Outstanding Science in Biodiversity Conservation. The prize, named for famous Harvard University myrmecologist Edwin O. Wilson, comes with a \$1,000 award, but its main value is the honor of receiving it.

Hayes didn't win it just by quietly laboring in his lab. His work on pesticides has angered plenty of people in the agricultural chemical industry, and, indeed, sometimes Hayes' fights with executives have degenerated into trash-talking, below-the-belt verbal brawls.

The Center for Biological Diversity, which gave Hayes the award, said: "He has been viciously criticized by the chemical industry, which has tried to discredit his research."

Wilson, for whom the award is named, is no stranger to controversy himself -- his 1975 book *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, kicked off a decades-long debate over evolution's influence over human behavior.

Wilson congratulated Hayes "on both his research and the example he sets."