

Focus on Pesticides

WHAT CHEMICALS ARE BEING SPRAYED?

Pesticides are one of the few toxic substances knowingly introduced into the environment. More appropriately called biocides, pesticides are designed to kill.

Synthetic pesticides have been widely applied since the 1940s - when DDT was found to be an effective pest killer. In 1962, biologist Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, linking widespread toxic effects in the environment to pesticide use. She warned of devastating ecological and human health effects and prompted further study of the matter.

Agriculture accounts for 84% of the 2 billion pounds of pesticides used in the U.S. each year - with the most common chemicals including organophosphates (parathion) and N-methyl carbamates (aldicarb). Current pesticide use in Canada and Europe is similar to that in the U.S. Use in Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and Africa resembles U.S. use in the 1950s, when DDT and other currently banned chemicals were widely used. Non-

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What You Need to Know About Pesticides

- * There are more than 2 billion pounds of pesticides used in U.S. agriculture every year. (Agricultural Resource Center, "Beyond Pesticides")
- * The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that chemicals applied to crops reach their target bug or weed only 1% of the time.
- * Between 1980 and 1993, pesticide use grew by 10%. Since 1940, pesticide use has increased tenfold, while losses to insects have doubled. (ARC)
- * As many as 300,000 farmworkers are poisoned by pesticides every year, and thousands die. (EPA)
- * In Washington State between 1987 and 1990, farmworkers had a rate of systematic poisoning 3.2 times above that of all workers and a rate of toxic disease 2.2 times that for all workers. (ARC)
- * Farmworkers suffer 5.5 chemical-related illnesses per 1,000 workers, the highest rate of any occupational group, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- * Harvesting in the fields, workers are frequently exposed to pesticide residues on crops. Also, they often ingest pesticides when they eat, drink, or smoke in the fields. Field workers may be exposed when pesticides are sprayed close to where they are working or adjacent to their homes.
- * Mild or early symptoms of pesticide poisoning include headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea and diarrhea. Symptoms of severe or acute poisoning are fever, thirst, vomiting, muscle spasms, pinpoint pupils, convulsions, breathing problems, and unconsciousness or death.
- * Children are especially vulnerable to pesticides because of their lower body weight, higher metabolism, and immature immune system. A New York study found that 1/3 of children who had worked in agriculture the previous year had been injured by pesticides. (U.S. General Accounting Office, "Hired farmworker: Health and well-being at risk")

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SAF Mission:

To bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.

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THE PACE PROJECT

focuses on NC farmworkers

The PACE project is focused on Preventing Agricultural Chemical Exposure among North Carolina Farmworkers.

Researchers at UNC-Chapel Hill, Wake Forest University, and N.C. State University, led by Dr. Thomas Arcury, are spending four years studying methods to minimize farmworker exposure to harmful chemicals.

The PACE project is working together with growers, farmworkers, extension agents, and health care workers. Researchers are focusing on tobacco and cucumber farms in Duplin, Harnett, Johnston, Nash, Sampson, Wake, Wayne, and Wilson counties. The North Carolina Farmworkers' Project is assisting in identifying and interviewing farmworkers.

The stages of the study include: preliminary interviews, analysis of safety problems, development of culturally appropriate solutions, and study of the effects of the interventions designed. The study is focused on cucumber and tobacco crops because these combine intensive hand labor and chemical application - a perfect recipe for pesticide exposure.

Farmworkers are both medically underserved and heavily exposed to disease-causing environmental hazards. The PACE project hopes to improve the

environmental health and safety of farmworkers by assessing knowledge of chemicals, reasons for exposure to pesticides, and effects of actual exposure.

The \$1.17 million study, scheduled to be completed in the year 2000, is funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Only a few studies have been done concerning the occupational health of farmworkers before the PACE project, so the information will be very valuable to all who work with pesticides.

For more information call Colin Austin at (919) 962-6835.

PESTICIDE INFORMATION

Training and materials:

Occupational Safety Branch
U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency
401 M Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460
Phone: (703) 305-7666

Health and environmental pesticide issues:

Pesticide Action Network
North America Regional Center
116 New Montgomery, #810
San Francisco, CA 94105
Phone: (415) 541-9140
Email: panna@igc.apc.org
http://www.panna.org/panna

Agricultural Resources Center
115 W. Main Street
Carrboro, NC 27510
Phone: (919) 967-1886



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

The Consumer's Role

The Environmental Protection Agency has found 77 different pesticides in the groundwater of 39 states. At the same time, over 70 carcinogenic pesticides are permitted by the EPA to be applied to food. In a 1987 study, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration found pesticide residue on 40% of fruits and vegetables sampled.

The EPA lists pesticides as the third leading cancer risk in the nation, and polls show that over 90% of people are worried about chemicals in their food and water.

So what actions can consumers take to change this situation? The Agricultural Resources Center suggests that the first step is to become aware of chemicals used at home, in the water, at the office, and at school. Consumers should also be aware of what chemicals are used on the food they eat. The Pesticide Action Network suggests buying organic (chemical-free), local, and in-season produce.

Consumers have the power to reduce farmworkers' exposure by demanding that pesticides not be used in harmful ways. The United Farm Workers of America constantly fight farmworkers' exposure to pesticides. The UFW continues to lead a boycott of California table grapes. To learn about how you can support the boycott, call the UFW at (408) 761-7171.

Special Emphasis Pesticide Inspection Program

Raymundo Hernandez died during the July 1995 tobacco harvest after becoming ill and dizzy and wandering away from a pesticide-coated field.

Raymundo's death and other tragedies linked to pesticide exposure have prompted North Carolina Statute 95-36.1(b)(3). This law mandates that the N.C. Department of Labor prioritizes inspection of those employers with a high risk of work related death, injury or illness.

The goal of the special emphasis program is to provide 24 hour response to cases of reported chemical exposure in the fields or in farmworker housing.

Complaints regarding pesticide exposure should be directed to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health at 1-800-LABOR-NC.

Understanding the EPA Worker Protection Standards

Those who work around pesticides must be aware of safety procedures and health risks. At the same time, employers have an obligation to provide workers with adequate information.

The 1993 Federal Worker Protection Standards mandate that when a pesticide is applied, farmworkers are notified of the name of the pesticide, where it is applied, and when workers can return to the area. Special training is required for all who work with pesticides.

Farmworkers must not be sent to work where pesticides are being applied or where pesticides might drift. Also, the law requires additional training for pesticide handlers and those who work in restricted areas. Most importantly, farmworkers cannot be punished for trying to follow EPA rules. The EPA Pesticide Hotline is available at 1-800-858-7378.

NIH Omits Latinos

Researchers at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the National Cancer Institute have chosen to omit Latinos from a \$15 million, 10 year study of the health of farmers, their families, and other workers exposed to pesticides. The National Center for Farmworker Health estimates that 85% of migrant farmworkers are Spanish-speaking Latino.

While another study involving migrant workers who are Latino is planned, those concerned with issues of environmental equity may want to write or telephone Dr. Donna Shalala, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 200 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201, (202) 619-0257.

