



CoSCEP

Coalition to Stop Children's Exposure to Pesticides

A Project of the Pesticide Education Center, San Francisco, California

Consumer Pesticide Safety Series

2 Lawn Care

Lawn Care Pesticides

- ✧ Pesticides are poisons that kill insects, weeds, and organisms that cause plant diseases. Animal studies show that many cause cancer, birth defects, infertility, and damage to the brain, nervous system, lungs, kidneys, liver, endocrine, and immune systems.
- ✧ Most pesticides never reach their target – 85 to 90 percent drift away traveling a mile or more – contaminating air, water, soil, other people's property and children's play areas. Pesticides residues enter your home through cracks and crevices and small openings around windows and doorways, and are tracked indoors by family members and pets
- ✧ Pesticides residues can remain indoors for a long time – weeks, months or even years – since there is no sunlight, air, wind or rain to break them down or wash them away. They contaminate furniture, upholstery, carpets, even children's toys. The highest levels are in house dust, especially carpet dust.

Human Health Problems

- ✧ Just because you do not get any symptoms from pesticides does not mean you are not being exposed and are not at risk. Long-term effects such as cancer and brain damage may occur from low level exposures over time that do not cause any apparent health problems.
- ✧ Pesticides can cause short-term (acute) effects, such as rashes, itching, burning of the eyes and throat, breathing problems, and flu-like symptoms (headache, nausea, muscle aches and fatigue). They can aggravate or precipitate asthma, allergies and chemical sensitivities.
- ✧ Long term (chronic) effects linked to pesticides include cancer, birth defects, Parkinson's disease, and damage to the brain, and other body systems. Cancers in adults associated with pesticides include brain cancer, leukemia, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, multiple myeloma, and cancer of the pancreas, prostate, kidney, bladder, eye and colon.

What About Children?

- ✧ Children are much more susceptible to pesticides than adults. They absorb more, because they have more skin surface for their size, and take in more breaths per minute. Children's ability to degrade pesticides is less mature, and their immune system protections are not fully developed.
- ✧ Many pesticides are easily absorbed into the body through the skin – especially in children crawling or playing on lawns and carpets, or with their toys. Children whose skin is wet (from saliva, urine, water) absorb 100% more pesticides than if their hands and skin were dry.
- ✧ Cancers in children associated with home use pesticides include brain cancer, leukemia, neuroblastoma, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and soft tissue sarcoma.

What About Pets?

- ✧ Cats and dogs have been poisoned by walking or lying on pesticide treated lawns and other surfaces, or by ingesting baits (especially snail bait in dogs) and contaminated foliage, animals and insects. Dogs are more likely to get a type of cancer called canine malignant lymphoma, or bladder cancer if their owners use lawn care chemicals.

How to Have a Healthy Non-Toxic Lawn

- ✧ Do not hire a company to put toxic chemicals (including herbicides) on your lawn, even on a one time basis. Many people are under the false impression that glyphosate (Roundup) and other herbicides are not pesticides.
- ✧ Do not give your lawn "junk food" by using chemical fertilizers. They quickly green it up, but stress the lawn making it more vulnerable to pests. Use compost, mulch, and natural organic materials instead.

- ❖ **BE PATIENT** while you transition from a chemical to a natural lawn. It takes time to create a natural, non-chemical dependent system. Seek out neighbors or organic gardeners who use natural methods. Hire a lawn company that does natural lawn care without chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides.
- ❖ Do not over water or water on a schedule. Wait until your lawn is really thirsty and then give it a long slow deep drink of water. This helps control pests by enabling roots to grow deeper and further downward.
- ❖ Do not cut your lawn too short – keep it about 2 to 3½ inches high. Mowing high results in longer thicker grass with more surface area to take in sunlight and promoting a deeper root system. Healthier grass is more pest resistant and it is harder for weeds to take hold.
- ❖ Do not be misled by lawn care companies who tell you that they only use pesticides registered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). **All** legal pesticides are registered by the EPA, which does not allow pesticides to be advertised or marketed as “safe”.
- ❖ Do not be misled by companies who tell you that herbicides and chemical fertilizers are compatible with a natural lawn. They are not. Or by companies that tell you they use IPM (Integrated Pest Management). Companies that say they use IPM also use toxic pesticides.
- ❖ Even if you are not concerned for yourself, your use of lawn chemicals can put your neighbors and others at risk – including children, pregnant women, cancer survivors, the elderly, and those with serious health problems.

Safer Alternatives to Toxic Pesticides

- ❖ **Insecticides:** insecticidal soaps (or 2 teaspoons mild detergent per gallon of water), food grade diatomaceous earth (NOT swimming pool filter type), neem products, horticultural oils, natural predators (found at organic gardening and nursery stores).
- ❖ **Herbicides:** corn gluten, hot water/vinegar, weed wackers, proper mowing and watering.
- ❖ **Fungicides:** Sulfur, baking soda, some copper products, cultural controls, proper watering and mowing
- ❖ **Fertilizers:** avoid chemical fertilizers, use compost, mulch, natural products.

What About Pest Control Companies?

- ❖ Do not sign a contract to have pesticides applied on a schedule, or on a regular basis. This results in unnecessary applications and expense, and maintains continuing levels of toxics in and around your home.
- ❖ Find a company that uses natural or organic methods and avoids use of the most toxic pesticides. Do not be fooled by companies that say they use “IPM” (Integrated Pest Management), but also use toxic pesticides.
- ❖ Do not be misled by companies who tell you they only use pesticides registered by the EPA. **All** legal pesticides are registered by the EPA.
- ❖ Make sure you have a written contract before any work begins on your property. The contract should have complete information on what pests are being treated, the methods of application, and the names and ingredients in ALL products..
- ❖ If you do not know what the product is, or what the potential risks are – do not allow its use on your property. Most pest control operators know little or nothing about delayed health effects of the products they use. Many do not know the effects on children and adults with asthma, allergies, chemical sensitivity, and underlying health problems.

Pesticide Education Center: P.O. Box 225279, San Francisco, CA 94122. 415-665-4722 pec@igc.org
 www.pesticides.org. *Designer Poisons, How to Protect Your Health and Home from Toxic Pesticides* by Dr. Marion Moses is available for \$15.00 prepaid from the center.

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