

Community Hopes For Info On Pesticides Sprayed On Homes, People

ARTICLE | MARCH 27, 2014 - 1:00AM | BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

On Oct. 16, 2013 John Burns says a private timber helicopter dripped poison onto him, his land, his neighbors and their water supply. He started coughing and his sinuses ran for hours. Neighbors reported their dogs getting sick and even dying, a horse went blind and the local fire chief had to go to the emergency room. Five months later, the more than 30 people of the Cedar Valley area outside Gold Beach who reported symptoms from asthma to nose bleeds still don't know what was in the chemical mix that hit the rural community.

Unable to get answers from local and state government, the residents teamed up with Eugene-based Beyond Toxics. On Jan. 27, Beyond Toxics filed a public records request with the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) but was denied the records. Beyond Toxics Executive Director Lisa Arkin appealed the decision to the Oregon attorney general and the Oregon Department of Justice (DOJ). On March 20, the AG agreed the records should be released.

Bruce Pokarney, the ODA's director of communications, says the agency has initiated the process of preparing the documents for Arkin, but since the "request is relatively extensive, we are not able to give a precise date of delivery, but the public records she has requested will be processed as soon as possible."

Arkin says rural residents and their doctors need to know what was in the chemical soup in order to be properly treated. Many of the residents are buying bottled water to drink because they don't know if the chemicals used bio-persist in water.

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) spray notice for the area says the chemicals that were potentially sprayed include 2,4-D, glyphosate, triclopyr, imazapyr, metsulfuron-methyl and crop oil as carrier. Crop oil is a petroleum-based product added to increase the effectiveness of the pesticide. Spray notices indicate what might be sprayed but not what was actually used in an aerial spray. Burns points out that 2,4-D is one of the ingredients in Agent Orange.

Burns, who retired to the coastal community with his wife from a career in industrial construction, says he is cautiously happy about the decision out of the AG's office, saying, "We feel, yeah it's great, if it does happen. We have to see it happen — we don't have the information in our hands yet."

On March 25, Arkin filed another petition with the DOJ asking for the "remaining undisclosed records" from the ODF on the spray and appealing ODF's denial of a fee waiver for the records.

"There is a public need for this information," Arkin says. "There is no reason not to release it." — *Camilla Mortensen*

About the Author »



Camilla Mortensen

Associate Editor and Reporter

Camilla Mortensen is associate editor and reporter at *Eugene Weekly*. She is also a folklorist and a community college and university instructor. She has two horses, an assortment of dogs, and lives in a 1975 Airstream trailer.

Sometimes all these details collide in unforeseen ways.

RELATED TERMS: News Briefs