

Herbicide spraying in Curry County draws complaints, state investigation

The Associated Press By The Associated Press

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GRANTS PASS — The state of Oregon is investigating complaints that an **herbicide sprayed** from a helicopter on commercial timberlands in Curry County drifted over people's homes and made some of them and their animals sick.

Oregon Department of Agriculture pesticide program manager Dale Mitchell says Crook Timberlands LLC had property north of Gold Beach sprayed Oct. 16 with glyphosate, the active ingredient in common household weed killers.

He says the investigation was launched after 15 people lodged complaints.

One of them was Beau Hanson, a 26-year-old meat cutter. He saw a helicopter flying back and forth a half mile away while he was outside cutting firewood. His 8-month-old daughter was with him.

Hanson says he smelled something sweet and tangy, and started having an asthma attack. He took his daughter in the house and closed the doors and windows. His daughter's hands and eyes swelled up.

"The asthma didn't go away for the next week," Hanson said. "Two days later I had a severe headache, trouble breathing. I missed work because of it. I'm still having breathing problems."

Crook Timberlands did not return telephone calls for comment.

The Department of Agriculture took vegetation samples from four properties to test for herbicides, said Mitchell. The investigation should be done in two months.

Mitchell identified the helicopter company as Pacific Air Research. A man who answered the phone at Pacific Air Research in White City denied any involvement and abruptly hung up.

Due to past complaints about Crook Timberlands spraying dating to 2007, the Department of Agriculture planned to monitor the spraying, but the Department of Forestry ended up doing it.

Michele Martin, 56, was working outside and thought the helicopter was looking for marijuana. Then she felt like someone sprayed insecticide in her mouth. She got a rash on her arms and forehead, a splitting headache, and stomach cramps. One of her horses has stopped eating. Another is running into fence posts, apparently unable to see.

"I want the timber companies to be able to control their weeds," said Martin, who runs a foster home for the developmentally disabled. "But they need to do it a better way. This whole chemical thing needs to stop if they can't prevent people from getting sick from it and accidents from happening."

In Oregon's forests, private landowners are the only ones doing widespread aerial spraying of herbicides. And Oregon's regulations are more lax than those in Washington and Idaho, said Lisa Arkin, executive director of Beyond Toxics in Eugene, a pesticides watchdog group.

Landowners are prohibited from allowing pesticides to fall on their neighbors' property, but there is no buffer zone around residential land, the way there is along fish-bearing streams.

Oregon does not require neighbors to be notified, though timberland owners do have to notify the Oregon Department of Forestry, and people can pay a fee to get those notifications. But they do not specifically say what chemicals will be used, or what day they will be sprayed.

In 2012 the Department of Agriculture investigated 525 pesticide cases, and 17 percent resulted in a violation or civil penalty, said Mitchell. Fines issued from July to September ranged from \$204 to \$962, according to the department website.

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