

Concerns Arise Over Pesticide Spray Near School

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Photo by Gary Hale / Forestland Dwellers

Jenn Ruppert had just dropped her kids off at school when she noticed the aerial spray of chemicals drifting down from an application just over 2 miles from Triangle Lake Charter School. She says she could smell the spray when she returned with her husband to retrieve her two daughters and let the school know about what was going on.

It was 8 am on the first day of classes, and a private timber company was spraying pesticides that were allegedly drifting onto nearby properties and onto the school itself.

The Hwy. 36 community and the Triangle Lake area are no strangers to the issue of aerial pesticide sprays. Organic farms and homes are bordered by industrial timberlands, and residents have long complained about the effects of the pesticides used on clearcuts. This latest spray once again calls attention to what critics see as a flawed system of dealing with pesticides on private timberlands.

After years of complaints, the Oregon Health Authority conducted the Highway 36 Exposure Investigation, which found that residents in the area had been exposed to the chemicals atrazine and 2,4-D, according to a 2013 public health assessment.

The Ruppert farm is a 1-mile drive from the school, a third of a mile as the crow flies, and Ruppert says she could smell the chemicals at her home as well. She says she and her children felt the effects of exposure to what was sprayed — nausea, burning eyes, shaking.

Gary Hale of Forestland Dwellers also observed and videoed the spray. Hale and his wife, Jan Wroncy, subscribe to the spray notifications from the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and supply notifications to *EW*, but he points out it is a paid subscription and unless you subscribe, residents will not be told an aerial spray is happening. The window can be several months long and up to a year, so even subscribers won't know exactly when a spray will happen until they see the helicopter or plane overhead.

Hale says, "If they are not going to have a large buffer around school, at least 3 to 5 miles, then schools should be notified," because while the spray notices are vague about the time and dates of sprays, they do list what chemicals might be sprayed. Without

notifications, Hale says, if a kid is sick and goes to the doctor, the doctor won't know what could have been used.

The spray notice Weyerhaeuser filed with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) says possible chemicals used were aminopyralid, metsulfuron methyl, glyphosate, imazapyr and sulfometuron methyl. The notice was submitted on Aug. 12, and the spray was slated to occur any time between Sept. 2 and Dec. 31. The areas were sprayed Sept. 8 and 9.

Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics, who went out to look at the area last week, says the buffer the Oregon Legislature voted give to school kids this year is 60 feet — the same it gives fish-bearing streams. She points out that the 60-foot measurement is from the buildings, not from the playground or other outdoor areas.

Arkin says, "In a community where there has been so much about aerial sprays and harm, Weyerhaeuser chose to spray all over the valley, close to the school on the first two days of school." She says the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) tells her there were at least 10 sprays the first day.

Ruppert reported the sprays and symptoms, and Bruce Pokarney of the ODA confirms that ODA inspectors have been to the Ruppert property and the school, "and have taken environmental samples (plants) from both locations. They are currently in the lab for analysis." He says, "I don't know yet when we will have results."

Weyerhaeuser spokesman Greg Miller says, "We are aware of the complaint filed with Oregon Department of Agriculture. We will cooperate with ODA as it proceeds through its complaint process. We follow all state and federal laws when we apply forest herbicides."

Ruppert has contacted the Triangle Lake school repeatedly, she says, and asked that information be provided to parents about their children's possible exposure, but she says that has not happened.

School principal and superintendent James Brookins says that Triangle Lake was not notified of the spray because it is not on ODF's list, but will be "potentially pursuing receiving" spray notifications, adding, if the spray notices "were to come out without prompting that would be wonderful."

He adds that as a charter school, Triangle Lake's focus areas are "health and wellness, technology and natural resources so we are, as an institution, concerned with these issues."

Ruppert says she too is concerned — both for her family and for the school — because Weyerhaeuser has been clearcutting around her property, and she worries about what will happen when the company begins to spray even closer to her home and the school. —

Camilla Mortensen



The Ruppert family at their farm.

Photo by Beyond Toxics

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.

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WILLIAM H GATHERCOLE & NORAH G • 2 days ago

NORAHG RESPONDS AGAINST EUGENE'S PESTICIDE-HATING FANATICS – GET OVER IT !

NO ONE will be harmed because of pest control products. There is NO public health crisis and NO imminent health threat. Get over it ! In Eugene and other locations, pesticide-hating fanatics are merely allergic to real facts, and personal frustrations that appear to be making them psychologically sick. The sprayed products cause NO harm, and are merely excreted from the human body in minuscule quantities and in an unreacted form. In Eugene and other locations, pest control products, such as 2,4-D herbicide, have been found below levels that can cause harm. The mere ability to measure or detect the presence of a pest control ingredient in the environment is NOT an indication that it poses any risk to people or environment, especially at the trace levels at which we can now detect them, which is in parts per trillion. Furthermore, most pest control products used have a short half-life in the environment – for example, 2,4-D herbicide has a relatively short half-life in water of 1 to 2 weeks. Even at almost undetectable levels, pest control products are short-lived. Moreover, most pest control products, such as 2,4-D herbicide, are NO more dangerous than household items like table salt – IN THEIR CONCENTRATED FORM (i.e. the product in its form prior to mixing with water). Overall, the risk assessments of pest control products indicate – • these products are practically non-toxic • these products are less toxic than table salt • these products are less toxic than aspirin • these products are less toxic than baking soda • these products are less toxic than caffeine • these products are less toxic than Tylenol • these products have less impact than soap • the risk assessments of pest control products indicate that they are practically-non-toxic, especially when used in the

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Four Percent • 3 days ago

Eugene Weekly you left out inconvenient facts from the Triangle Lake Study. Such as in the urine samples collected by the OHA, no atrazine was found and the average result for 2,4-D found was 0.4 µg/g, which is well below the national average.

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Where is the risk? • 4 days ago

They sprayed all over Triangle Lake area and only one person complained? This is news? This just in, dog falls over and one resident complains about uneven pavement. How about the hundreds of people in the Triangle Lake area who didn't complain. That seems much bigger news.

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Tom Baxter → Where is the risk? • 2 days ago

Those people whom do not complain about herbicide drift probably never go outside. You'd have to be numbed to the point of pacivity to not notice the affects on one's health.

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chris williamson • 4 days ago

Time for all of you locals to pool your money together and hire at least one good lobbyist, the more the better though. Community activism doesn't work unless you have thousands marching the Legislature almost day and

night in Salem. Money and influence talks in Salem, even for the supposedly Pro- Environmentalist Democrats". Otherwise better pack your bags and move.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



spiralmom • 4 days ago

Thank you for keeping such an important issue at the forefront of people's minds. Aerial spraying of herbicides needs to end, and people have the right to know what is going to affect their property and health. Several kids reported sickness after this spray. When are we going to ban together and STOP these corporate timber companies from doing business as usual and start making them own up to their harms!!??

Many counties are looking into writing their own more protective laws - civil disobedience through lawmaking! The suffragists had to break that law before they could fix it!!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Tom Baxter • 4 days ago

If you ask ODOT, herbicides are perfectly harmful.....er...I mean harmless. Just ask the 2 dead sheep that were grazing along HWY 34 on July 20th and were just 40 feet from road side when drift blew upon them and they died in a couple of hours from something strange and unusual that burned their throats and lungs to the point of death!!!!

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