

## State Pesticide Spray Investigation Wraps Up

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For years rural residents along Highway 36 near Triangle Lake in Oregon's Coast Range have been asking, even demanding, that someone look into the chemicals drifting from airplanes and onto their farms, and into their homes and drinking water. They've complained of the health effects on themselves and their children. They've had their own urine tested for the herbicides atrazine and 2,4-D.

This month, an Oregon Health Authority (OHA) investigation into those sprays wrapped up with recommendations that include notifying residents in a timely and specific manner and that "state agencies continue to collaborate on determining best practices that would protect human populations from pesticide exposures." The report also suggests that the residents get a mediator.

Lisa Arkin, whose nonprofit Beyond Toxics has teamed up with the rural dwellers to fight the sprays, sees hope in the report, particularly the recommendation that residents are notified of incipient chemical sprays. Right now, she says, people "pay for the privilege" of getting a list of sprays that might happen six to 12 months from now. She says that, ideally, nearby residents would get from 24 to 48 hours notice of exactly where and when a spray will be so they can bring pets and livestock inside and cover gardens.

*EW* publishes a list of upcoming pesticide applications collected by the group Forestland Dwellers in its Spray Schedule.

Arkin says Beyond Toxics — which recently coordinated to bring scientist and atrazine expert Tyrone Hayes out to the area to talk about his research on the chemical — is also pleased that the OHA recommended adequate recordkeeping so all spray data is completely accurate and timely.

Arkin says one thing she noted coming out of the report was that "we're going to learn more about the persistence of these chemicals in the environment and living things." In spring 2011 when the residents had their urine tested, elevated levels of atrazine and 2,4-D were found. Atrazine is an endocrine disruptor, and Hayes' research has shown links between atrazine exposure and the feminization of male amphibians.

When the residents were tested in August of that year, the final report indicated that 92 percent of the participants over six years of age had detectable levels of 2,4-D in urine. The report says, "Statistical tests on urinary 2,4-D levels indicated that the range of levels was consistent with the general population at the time of sampling." But Arkin points out none of the residents had recently reported using the chemicals on their properties, and atrazine is most commonly used in the surrounding timberlands in the spring, months before the August testing.

In its findings, the investigation says, "Because 2,4-D and atrazine rapidly clear from the body, the levels of these chemicals in urine can only be used to assess recent (within 24-48 hours) exposures." And it notes that it's unknown if pesticide applicators changed their practices during the investigation.

Arkin adds, "There's a gap here. We need to explain how it's possible it was still found in some urine in the fall when they hadn't been sprayed in a long time."

Despite the low levels in the fall sample, the report also points out that, "Currently, there is little scientific information about the health implications of exposure to multiple chemicals at low doses."

One result of the investigation is that the Environmental Protection Agency has been working on passive air samplers that hopefully will better measure pesticide sprays along Highway 36 as well as in the rest of the state.

***About the Author »***

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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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