



Media contact:
Kelly Campbell
Pesticide Action Network North America
415-981-1771 ext. 350
Satellite feed available

Embargoed for Release:
12:01 a.m. (EDT), Tuesday May 11, 2004

NEWS RELEASE

Many U.S. Residents Carry Toxic Pesticides Above “Safe” Levels

Report shows Children, Women and Mexican Americans Shoulder Heaviest “Pesticide Body Burden”

SAN FRANCISCO—Many U.S. residents carry toxic pesticides in their bodies above government assessed “acceptable” levels, according to a report released today by Pesticide Action Network North America (PAN). *Chemical Trespass: Pesticides in Our Bodies and Corporate Accountability*, makes public for the first time an analysis of pesticide-related data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in a study of levels of chemicals in 9,282 people nationwide. The report reveals that government and industry have failed to safeguard public health from pesticide exposures.

“None of us choose to have hazardous pesticides in our bodies,” said Kristin Schafer, PAN Program Coordinator and lead author of the report. “Yet CDC found pesticides in 100% of the people who had both blood and urine tested. The average person in this group carried a toxic cocktail of 13 of the 23 pesticides we analyzed.”

Many of the pesticides found in the test subjects have been linked to serious short- and long-term health effects including infertility, birth defects and childhood and adult cancers. “While the government develops safety levels for each chemical separately, this study shows that in the real world we are exposed to multiple chemicals simultaneously,” explained Margaret Reeves, Ph.D., Senior Scientist at PAN. “The synergistic effects of multiple exposures are unknown, but a growing body of research suggests that even at very low levels, the combination of these chemicals can be harmful to our health.”

Chemical Trespass found that children, women and Mexican Americans shouldered the heaviest “pesticide body burden.” For example, children—the population most vulnerable to pesticides—are exposed to the highest levels of nerve-damaging organophosphorous (OP) pesticides. The CDC data show that the average 6 to 11 year-old sampled is exposed to the OP pesticide chlorpyrifos at four times the level U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considers “acceptable” for a long-term exposure. Chlorpyrifos, produced principally by Dow Chemical Corporation and found in numerous products such as Dursban™, is designed to kill insects by disrupting the nervous system. Although US EPA restricted chlorpyrifos for most residential uses in 2000, it continues to be used widely in agriculture and other settings. In humans, chlorpyrifos is also a nerve poison, and has been shown to disrupt hormones and interfere with normal development of the nervous system in laboratory animals.

The report also found that women have significantly higher levels of three of the six organochlorine (OC) pesticides evaluated. This class of pesticides is known to have multiple harmful effects when they cross the placenta during pregnancy, including reduced infant birth weight and disruption of brain development, which can lead to learning disabilities and other neurobehavioral problems. This ability of organochlorine pesticides to pass from mother to child puts future generations at serious risk.

PAN's analysis found that Mexican Americans carry dramatically higher body burdens of five of the 17 evaluated pesticides in urine samples, including a breakdown product of methyl parathion, a neurotoxic, endocrine-disrupting, insecticide. Mexican Americans also had significantly higher body burdens of the breakdown products of the insecticides lindane and DDT than those found in other ethnic groups.

Chemical Trespass argues that pesticide manufacturers are primarily responsible for the problem of pesticide body burden. "The pesticides we carry in our bodies are made and aggressively promoted by agrochemical companies," stated Skip Spitzer, Corporate Accountability Program Coordinator at PAN. "These companies also spend millions on political influence to block or undermine regulatory measures designed to protect public health and the environment."

The report introduces the Pesticide Trespass Index (PTI), a new tool for quantifying responsibility of individual pesticide manufacturers for their "pesticide trespass." Using the PTI, the report estimates that Dow Chemical is responsible for at least 80% of the chlorpyrifos breakdown products found in the bodies of those in the U.S.

"The fact that our children carry dangerous pesticides in their bodies represents a dramatic failure in the way our government protects us from toxic pesticides," said Monica Moore, PAN Program Director. "We must stop this toxic trespass by shifting the burden from our bodies back to the corporate boardroom where it belongs."

Chemical Trespass provides recommendations for government, industry and the public including:

- US Congress should conduct a thorough and independent investigation into corporate responsibility and liability for pesticide body burdens, and establish financial mechanisms to shift health and environmental costs of pesticides to the corporations that produce them.
- US EPA should ban use of pesticides known to be hazardous and pervasive in the environment and our bodies, and should immediately phase out all uses of chlorpyrifos and lindane.
- US EPA should require that manufacturers bear the burden of proof for demonstrating that a pesticide does not harm human health before it can be registered, and should work with USDA to actively promote least-toxic pest control methods.
- Individuals should pressure government officials and corporations to implement these changes, seek alternatives to pesticide use and buy organic products whenever possible.

SATELLITE FEED:

FIRST FEED

DATE: Tuesday, May 11, 2004

TIME: 13:30-13:45 ET

SATELLITE: AMC 9

Transponder 22

SATELLITE TYPE: C Band

ORBITAL POSITION: 85 Degrees West

DOWNLINK POLARITY:

Horizontal

DOWNLINK FREQUENCY: 4140

AUDIO: 6.2/6.8

SECOND FEED

DATE: Tuesday, May 11, 2004

TIME: 16:30-16:45 ET

SATELLITE: AMC 9

Transponder 22

SATELLITE TYPE: C Band

ORBITAL POSITION: 85 Degrees West

DOWNLINK POLARITY:

Horizontal

DOWNLINK FREQUENCY: 4140

AUDIO: 6.2/6.8

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To obtain a copy of Chemical Trespass, call 415-981-1771 or download from www.panna.org