



FRONT & CENTER NEWS

“Safe” Pesticides Now First in Poisonings

Center Unveils New Report Based on Internal EPA Data



WASHINGTON, D.C., July 31, 2008 — According to a new Center investigation, *Perils of the New Pesticides*, pyrethrins and pyrethroids were responsible for more than 26 percent of all major and moderate human incidents involving pesticides in the United States in 2007, up from just 15 percent in 1998 — a 67 percent increase. This is based on an analysis of adverse reaction reports filed with the Environmental Protection Agency by pesticide manufacturers.

As a result of the Center’s investigation, the director of the EPA’s Office of Pesticide Programs said the agency would begin a broad study of the human health effects of these chemicals this year.

“The alarming rise of pesticide-related incidents attributed to pyrethrin and pyrethroid affiliated products is a serious concern for the millions of households that use them,” said Center Executive Director Bill Buzenberg. “The Center for Public Integrity uncovered this public safety issue through more than a dozen Freedom of Information Act requests and crunching the data. This should be basic public information if the EPA were doing its job.”

Data from the American Association of Poison Control Centers reveals a similar trend that supports the EPA data analyzed by the Center. The number of reported pyrethrin and pyrethroid incidents to poison centers across the country jumped from 16,000 in 1998 to more than 26,000 in 2006, a 63 percent rise.

Pyrethrins, naturally-occurring compounds with insecticidal properties derived from chrysanthemum flowers, are used in commonly available household products to control insects in the home, on pets, and on people. Their synthetic counterparts, pyrethroids, have similar properties to pyrethrins, and were created as safer alternatives to an earlier class of pesticides (organophosphates), originally derived from nerve gas. Manufacturers’ use of pyrethroids has grown widely to include thousands of household products, ranging from bug repellants, anti-lice shampoos, pet shampoos, and carpet cleaners.

While pyrethroids are generally believed to be less toxic than organophosphates, the number of reported human health problems, including severe reactions and even deaths attributed to pesticides containing pyrethrins and pyrethroids, increased from 261 in 1998 to 1,030 in 2007,

nearly a 300 percent increase. Pyrethrins and pyrethroids accounted for more incidents than any other class of pesticide over the last five years. EPA data shows at least 50 deaths attributed to this supposedly safer class of pesticides since 1992.

While organophosphates have been extensively studied and their impact on public health thoroughly documented, researchers and scientists are still unsure of the long-term neurotoxicity of pyrethrins and pyrethroids, particularly among children and those susceptible to allergies. Even so, the EPA does not require product warning labels cautioning consumers with allergies of the dangers associated with pyrethrins and pyrethroids products. However, the Food and Drug Administration does require warning labels on shampoos that contain pyrethrins and pyrethroids.

The Center’s investigation includes an online nationwide pesticide incident database that allows anyone to search by state, city, exposure type, chemical, and product.

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