

Groups Seeking Ban on Toxic Pesticide Go To Federal Court

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Outlawed in homes and gardens, pesticide is still sprayed on food crops

NEW YORK, NY -- (July 22, 2010) Community groups joined environmental advocates in filing a [lawsuit today](#) to force the Environmental Protection Agency to decide once and for all whether or not it will ban the toxic pesticide [chlorpyrifos](#) (PDF).

Chlorpyrifos -- sprayed on corn, oranges, almonds and other crops -- is acutely poisonous and is among a class of pesticides initially developed for World War II-era chemical warfare. Short term effects of exposure to chlorpyrifos include chest tightness, blurred vision, headaches, coughing and wheezing, weakness, nausea and vomiting, coma, seizures, and even death. Prenatal and early childhood exposure has been linked to [low birth weights](#), [developmental delays](#) and other health effects.

In recognition of the particular risks the chemical presents for children, EPA banned residential uses of chlorpyrifos in 2001. But the pesticide is still widely used in fields and orchards across the country. This continued use puts nearby rural communities in harm's way, and chlorpyrifos ends up in our nation's food and water supplies, leading to even more widespread exposure (click [here for a list of foods with documented chlorpyrifos residue](#).)

Luis Medellin has experienced the dangers of this pesticide firsthand. Medellin lives with his parents and three little sisters in the agricultural town of Lindsay, California, where chlorpyrifos is sprayed routinely on the orange groves surrounding his home. During the growing season, the family is awakened several times a week by the sickly smell of nighttime pesticide spraying. What follows is worse: searing headaches, nausea, vomiting. After undergoing testing for pesticides in his body, the 24-year-old Medellin discovered concentrations of chlorpyrifos breakdown compounds nearly five times the national average for adults, as calculated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"When I found out I had this chemical in my body, it scared me. But what really worries me is how my little sisters might be affected," said Medellin, a community organizer with the Lindsay -based El Quinto Sol. "I wish the growers would stop using such dangerous chemicals so my family and I can be safe."

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In September 2007, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA) filed a petition with EPA asking the agency to ban chlorpyrifos. In the nearly three years since, the agency has not responded. Today's [lawsuit](#), filed by the nonprofit environmental law firm Earthjustice on behalf of NRDC and PANNA, would force EPA to make a decision on the pesticide's ban.

"This dangerous pesticide has no place in our fields, near our children, or on our food," said Earthjustice attorney Kevin Regan. "We're asking a court to rule so that EPA will finish the job and ban this poison."

An estimated 8 to 10 million pounds of chlorpyrifos are applied to U.S. crops each year ([click here for a map](#) showing where this pesticide is used.)

"The overwhelming evidence shows that chlorpyrifos is dangerous, especially to children and fieldworkers," said Aaron Colangelo, a senior attorney with NRDC. "There's no good reason for EPA to take three years to decide what to do about it."

Exposure to chlorpyrifos in agricultural communities is widespread. California Air Resources Board monitoring in the state's San Joaquin Valley detected chlorpyrifos in one-third of all ambient air samples, sometimes at levels that pose serious health risks to young children. Monitoring by PANNA and community groups in Washington state and Luis Medellin's hometown of Lindsay, California has shown that daily exposure to chlorpyrifos can be substantial, regularly exceeding the "acceptable" 24-hour acute dose for a one-year-old child established by the EPA.

In one 2000 incident, dozens of students and staff at an elementary school in Ventura, CA fell ill after chlorpyrifos applied to a nearby lemon orchard drifted onto school grounds.

"Chlorpyrifos is among a class of pesticides that targets developing nervous systems -- in insects and humans alike. These pesticides are linked to a host of devastating diseases ranging from ADHD to childhood brain cancer," said PANNA senior scientist Dr. Margaret Reeves. "Their human health costs are just too high and farmers are farming successfully without them. There's no defensible reason for continuing to use chlorpyrifos."

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BACKGROUND

A copy of the lawsuit is available here:

<http://www.earthjustice.org/documents/legal-document/pdf/2073-complaint>

A fact sheet on chlorpyrifos is available here:

<http://www.panna.org/docsOPs/cpfactsheetoct06%5b1%5d.pdf>

A map documenting where chlorpyrifos is used is available here:

http://water.usgs.gov/nawqa/pnsp/usage/maps/show_map.php?year=02&map=m6009

A list of foods with documented chlorpyrifos residue is available here:

<http://www.whatsonmyfood.org/pesticide.jsp?pesticide=160>

A study linking chlorpyrifos to low birth weights is available here:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1247388/pdf/ehp0112-001125.pdf>

A study linking chlorpyrifos to developmental delays is available here:

<http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/mailman/ccceh/pdf-papers/LovasiAJPH201...>

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