

School Pesticide Monitor

A Bi-Monthly Bulletin on Pesticides and Alternatives

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Vol. 9 No. 3 2009

Hazardous Pesticide Use in North Carolina Child Care Centers

Parents and child care providers work hard to provide a loving, stimulating environment that is safe for children, yet they may be exposing them to hazardous chemicals. A new report finds that more than half of surveyed child care providers in North Carolina use broadcast spray and/or "bug bombs" in their centers. The report, *Avoiding Big Risks for Small Kids: Results of the 2008 NC Child Care Pest Control Survey*, by the nonprofit group Toxic Free NC, is based on a survey of 89 child care providers from across the state who answered questions about pests, pesticides and safety at their facilities.

"As a pediatrician and a mother, I believe we should be avoiding the use of toxic chemicals in children's environments," says Katherine Shea, M.D., M.P.H. "Child care centers, where our youngest and

most vulnerable children spend time eating and sleeping, playing and learning, should be safe and free from known chemical hazards like pesticides."

Young children are among the most likely age group to suffer long-term harm to their health from exposure to pesticides. Numerous scientific studies have connected pesticide exposure in early life to an increased risk of asthma, harm to growing brains, and some childhood cancers.

The report's authors recommend the creation of training and certification programs in non-chemical and least-toxic methods of pest control, also called Integrated Pest Management (IPM), for pest control companies and child care providers. An IPM program utilizes pest

prevention and management strategies, such as improved sanitation, structural repairs and pest population monitoring, with the least-toxic pesticide application only as a last resort. One out of four child care providers surveyed reported using least-toxic or IPM pest control methods; those same centers also reported fewer serious pest problems.

Public schools in the state are required to switch to IPM under the 2006 *School Children's Health Act*, but no such requirement exists for child care centers.

Pest control professional Philip Maready agrees with the report's IPM recommendation, "Having worked with public school systems in implementing IPM programs, I believe it is important to use those same

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Virginia Adopts Weakened School IPM Bill

Virginia will be providing information to its school districts on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) that "minimizes the use of pesticides and the risk to human health and the environment associated with pesticide applications," thanks to a new school IPM law. While the law will increase public awareness of the antiquated practice of routine pesticide applications at school facilities, it does not mandate a change in practices.

Intrinsic to an IPM program is pesticide use reduction and elimination strategies that protect children and staff from unnecessary pesticide use and exposure at schools, while at the same time eliminating pest problems. Experience shows that school pest management must emphasize pest prevention and management strategies that exclude pests from the school facility through habitat modification, entryway closures, structural repairs, sanitation practices, natural

organic management of playing fields and landscapes, other non-chemical, mechanical and biological methods, and the use of the least-toxic pesticides only as a last resort.

The IPM legislation was originally written to require that all Virginia school districts adopt an IPM program and contained a strong definition of IPM, but was amended in the House Agriculture Committee. One benefit that came out of the amended version of the legislation is the requirement for all districts to keep records on the pesticides applied at schools.

Currently in Virginia, a number of districts in the state already have some level of an IPM program, including Fairfax County Public Schools, the largest in the state. Time will tell if distributing information to schools will be enough to get more schools to adopt safer pest man-

agement practices.

According to Beyond Pesticides research, 14 states (IL, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, NJ, NY, NC, OH, PA, TX, and WV) require schools to adopt an IPM program and 7 states (CA, CT, MN, MT, VT, FL, and RI) recommend that schools adopt IPM programs. Without federal legislation like the proposed *School Environment Protection Act* (SEPA), school IPM adoption will likely remain spotty across the country as it is now.

In order to truly protect children from pests and toxic pesticide exposure, schools must adopt a strong IPM program, prohibit the use of toxic pesticides for aesthetic/cosmetic purposes, and prohibit the use of certain hazardous pesticides, such as probable, possible or known carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, reproductive toxins, developmental toxins, neurotoxins, and toxicity category I and II pesticides.

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The bi-monthly *Monitor* provides a range of current information, resources and organizing and technical assistance to parents, public health activists, school staff and administrators, policy makers and others working toward the adoption and implementation of safer school pest management programs on the local, state and national level. Topics also include specific school pest problems and implementation techniques, IPM cost examples, pesticide profiles, action alerts and children's environmental health studies.

Contact Beyond Pesticides Today: kowens@beyondpesticides.org, 202-543-5450 or 701 E Street S.E. Washington DC 20003.

Birth Defects Linked to Pesticide Exposure at Time of Conception

A study published in the April 2009 issue of the medical journal *Acta Paediatrica* reports that the highest rates of birth defects for U.S. babies arise when conception occurs during the spring and summer months, when pesticide use increases and high concentrations of pesticides are found in surface waters.

Researchers analyzed all 30.1 million births in the U.S. between 1996 and 2002. The correlation between the month of last menstrual period and higher rates of birth defects is statistically significant for half of the 22 categories of birth defects reported in the Centers for Disease Con-

trol database from 1996 to 2002, including spina bifida, cleft lip, clubfoot and Down's syndrome.

The study relies on findings by the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. EPA and other agencies on the seasonal variations in nitrates and pesticides in the surface water.

Pesticides, even at low levels, have been associated with reproductive and developmental effects as well as endocrine disruption.

Birth defects are known to be associated

with risk factors such as alcohol, smoking, diabetes or advanced age. However, the researchers found that even mothers who did not report these risk factors had higher overall birth defect rates for babies conceived from April to July.

"Birth defects, which affect about 3 out of 100 newborns in the U.S., are one of the leading causes of infant death. What we are most excited about is that if our suspicions are right and pesticides are contributing to birth defect risk, we can reverse or modify the factors that are causing these lifelong and often very serious medical problems," said Dr. Winchester.

Hazardous Pesticide Use in North Carolina Child Care Centers ... continued

IPM strategies in sensitive environments such as day care facilities," he said.

The report also finds that child care providers that employ professional pest

control contractors are more likely to report that high-risk methods are used in their facilities than those who handle pest control in-house. The survey results show that the most common pest problems faced by child care providers include ants, mosquitoes, fire ants, weeds, and flies. Some of these pest problems are

more serious than others, but all can be managed safely and effectively with least-toxic IPM methods.

According to Beyond Pesticides' research, IL, MA, MI, RI and WV require child care facilities implement IPM programs and have restrictions on pesticide use.