

## Focus on Pesticides

### WHAT CHEMICALS ARE BEING SPRAYED?

Pesticides are one of the few toxic substances knowingly introduced into the environment. More appropriately called biocides, pesticides are designed to kill.

Synthetic pesticides have been widely applied since the 1940s - when DDT was found to be an effective pest killer. In 1962, biologist Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, linking widespread toxic effects in the environment to pesticide use. She warned of devastating ecological and human health effects and prompted further study of the matter.

Agriculture accounts for 84% of the 2 billion pounds of pesticides used in the U.S. each year - with the most common chemicals including organophosphates (parathion) and N-methyl carbamates (aldicarb). Current pesticide use in Canada and Europe is similar to that in the U.S. Use in Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and Africa resembles U.S. use in the 1950s, when DDT and other currently banned chemicals were widely used. Non-

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### What You Need to Know About Pesticides

- \* There are more than 2 billion pounds of pesticides used in U.S. agriculture every year. (Agricultural Resource Center, "Beyond Pesticides")
- \* The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that chemicals applied to crops reach their target bug or weed only 1% of the time.
- \* Between 1980 and 1993, pesticide use grew by 10%. Since 1940, pesticide use has increased tenfold, while losses to insects have doubled. (ARC)
- \* As many as 300,000 farmworkers are poisoned by pesticides every year, and thousands die. (EPA)
- \* In Washington State between 1987 and 1990, farmworkers had a rate of systematic poisoning 3.2 times above that of all workers and a rate of toxic disease 2.2 times that for all workers. (ARC)
- \* Farmworkers suffer 5.5 chemical-related illnesses per 1,000 workers, the highest rate of any occupational group, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- \* Harvesting in the fields, workers are frequently exposed to pesticide residues on crops. Also, they often ingest pesticides when they eat, drink, or smoke in the fields. Field workers may be exposed when pesticides are sprayed close to where they are working or adjacent to their homes.
- \* Mild or early symptoms of pesticide poisoning include headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea and diarrhea. Symptoms of severe or acute poisoning are fever, thirst, vomiting, muscle spasms, pinpoint pupils, convulsions, breathing problems, and unconsciousness or death.
- \* Children are especially vulnerable to pesticides because of their lower body weight, higher metabolism, and immature immune system. A New York study found that 1/3 of children who had worked in agriculture the previous year had been injured by pesticides. (U.S. General Accounting Office, "Hired farmworker: Health and well-being at risk")

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