



Pesticide Right-to-Know in Alaska

In 1999, Alaska Community Action on Toxics' research demonstrated that the Anchorage School District was using harmful pesticides that posed a health threat, particularly to children. The ASD did not provide any notification to students, parents, or teachers when pesticides were to be applied. ACAT and Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA) compelled the Anchorage School District to cancel its scheduled routine district-wide application of pesticides—one of which was chlorpyrifos that was later banned by the EPA. As a result of six months of ACAT and AYEA advocacy, the school board (February 2000) established a least-toxic pest-management policy written by ACAT that is one of the most progressive policies in the nation. The policy also requires notification of parents, student, and teachers. Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) awarded the Anchorage School District a *Beyond Compliance* award for their precedent-setting policy. In an ADEC news release (October 26, 2001), Commissioner Michelle Brown “lauded the efforts” of ACAT and AYEA:

We've gotten in front of a problem plaguing other school districts in the nation. ACAT and these involved young people worked hard to see these rules made, and their foresight will protect the health of school children in the future.

In the same October media release, the School Board's new superintendent, Carol Comeau, is also quoted:

I really want to commend the students with Alaska Youth for Environmental Action and Alaska Community Action on Toxics for bringing this issue forward. It shows that the public process works. Our new policy promotes a healthy and safe school environment for students and staff. We will use non-chemical measures first, with pesticides used only as a last resort and with parental notification.

As a result of continuous pressure by ACAT and other organizations, the ADEC Commissioner Brown signed new statewide regulations in October 2001 requiring school administrators to “ensure the use of non-chemical methods to control pests, such as proper sanitation practices, structural repair, and window screens.” The regulations require notification to parents and teachers prior to application of a pesticide.

ACAT has been serving as an information source for those working toward adoption of a State pesticide right-to-know law that would track the use of pesticides in Alaska. When passed, this law will allow correlations between pesticides and diseases in Alaska and establish a Pesticide Advisory Board to educate the public about alternatives to pesticides.

Pesticides can profoundly damage our health. Recent studies demonstrate that pesticide exposures are linked with Parkinson's disease, learning disabilities, birth defects, lymphoma, and leukemia. Harmful pesticides are often applied without our notice or consent. Children, elderly people, and those with chronic illnesses are particularly vulnerable to pesticide exposures.

In Alaska, pesticides are used in places where we live, work, and play: in parks, public buildings, grocery stores, apartment buildings, airports, schools, day care facilities, universities, greenhouses, agricultural and forest lands, hospitals, nursing homes, military reservations, and in the oil industry. Pesticides affect our water quality, foods, and health. Although there are 4,571 pesticides registered for use in Alaska, we have no reliable system to track the amounts and locations of pesticide use.

Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) supports the Pesticide Right-to-Know Bill sponsored during the 2002 legislative session by Representative Sharon Cissna and Senator Johnny Ellis. We need statewide measures to track pesticide use in all places where people may be exposed. The Pesticide Right-to-Know bill requires commercial pesticide users to report basic information about the quantities, types, times, and locations of use. The bill also requires companies to notify the public about pesticide applications.

Alaska is the only state that does not require chemical corporations to pay a fee to register pesticides. The bill is fiscally sound because the program will be funded through modest registration fees from chemical corporations for pesticides imported into the state. We support strengthening the bill to include reporting and tracking of all pesticide uses. This bill will dispel speculation and misrepresentation of facts, and support responsible pest management business practices.

Toxic exposures to pesticides are preventable causes of harm. The bill will help protect public health. Please contact your legislators to support the Pesticide Right-to-Know bill. ACAT's goal is to prevent the use of harmful pesticides in Alaska that may damage the environment or human health.