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MICHIGAN SCHOOLS GET “C” ON PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM TOXIC PESTICIDES

Survey of 42 Districts Shows Schools Could Do More to Reduce Health Risks

Michigan school districts are doing a fair job of complying with state requirements on the spraying of pesticides in schools, but should increase efforts to notify parents of spraying in advance and monitor health effects among students, according to four environmental groups.

Clean Water Fund, the Ecology Center, Michigan Environmental Council and West Michigan Environmental Action Council called on the state Department of Agriculture and local schools to do a better job of alerting parents and protecting children from pesticides applications. Under a 1992 state rule, schools are supposed to inform parents of their right to be notified in advance of all pesticide applications in school buildings.

“The variability of the response by schools to state law is a cause for concern,” said Dr. William Weil, an East Lansing pediatrician. “We should do everything we can to reduce the unnecessary exposure of children to pesticides and other chemicals.”

“Students are required to attend schools and therefore should have the same right-to-know about exposures that workers have. We need to make sure that parents are adequately notified.” Stated Mary Beth Doyle of the Ecology Center.

Pesticides can pose significant health risks. Some 48 pesticides are commonly used in schools nationwide, some known to cause cancer or reproductive effects. Glyphosate and lambda cyhalothrin, two of the pesticides cited most frequently by school districts in the Michigan survey, have been associated with adverse health effects.

“Children need a safe, healthy place to learn, and we are calling upon schools and parents to make sure that our children are not exposed to toxic pesticides.” Said Jenny Allen of WMEAC.

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The groups called on Michigan members of Congress to co-sponsor the School Environmental Protection Act of 2001 (SEPA), which would establish a national policy to promote least toxic pest management strategies in schools, strengthen notification requirements, and require safety findings on pesticides used in school buildings. More information about SEPA is available from the beyond Pesticides website, <http://www.beyondpesticides.org>

The Michigan survey found:

The good

- The majority of schools surveyed post notices of coming pesticide applications.
- Most districts have control over how and when pesticides are applied when done by an outside company.
- Most districts have a formal, written policy covering pesticide application.

The bad

- Some school districts never make parents aware of their right to be notified in advance of pesticides applications except by posting in schools, where parents are not likely to see the information.
- The majority of districts don't handle their own pest control, instead contracting with private firms.
- Nine schools rely exclusively on pesticides for pest control and do not use less-toxic alternatives.
- Over 40% of schools take no steps to monitor health problems resulting from pesticide use.

“Protecting children from neurotoxins and potential carcinogens should not be a local option,” said Dave Dempsey, MEC Policy Advisor. “Congress should enact federal law and the state should increase efforts to get local schools to comply with state requirements.”

"There are good examples of things Michigan schools can do to reduce exposure of our children to pesticides," said Bethany Renfer, Clean Water Fund. "Schools like Lewis Cass Technical High School in Detroit have proven that there *are* safer, effective alternatives to using toxic pesticides."

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