

● BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT PESTICIDES ●

DOES GOVERNMENT REGISTRATION MEAN PESTICIDES ARE SAFE?

Legally, pesticides are supposed to be regulated so that they do not cause “unreasonable adverse effects” and so that there is “a reasonable certainty that no harm will result” from their use. But does this mean that pesticides, by a common-sense definition, are safe? No.

For example, consider NCAP’s survey of 19 recently registered pesticides. Seven cause cancer, six cause genetic damage, one causes miscarriages, one causes birth defects, one causes cataracts, and one causes liver and kidney damage. Eight are toxic to fish, one to shrimp, and one to oysters. Five are potential groundwater contaminants. These hazards do not meet a common-sense definition of safety.

By law, pesticides are regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) so that they “will not generally cause unreasonable adverse effects on the environment.”¹ A newer federal law sets a higher standard for pesticides used on food; their residues must be “safe,”² defined as “a reasonable certainty that no harm will result from aggregate exposure to the pesticide.”² But does this mean that pesticides, by a common-sense definition, are safe? No.

Pesticide regulation is full of loopholes. Many pesticides in use today were registered using old test protocols and have not yet been reevaluated under current standards.³ Pesticide testing is performed or paid for by pesticide manufacturers,⁴ setting up a built-in conflict of interest. Many tests are only “conditionally required”⁵ and are often waived. Tests ignore the multiple pesticides to which people are regularly exposed because they only look at one pesticide at a time.⁵

Probably the simplest way to evaluate for ourselves whether registration means pesticides are “safe” is to look at recently registered pesticides and see if they meet a common-sense definition of safety. As newly registered pesticides, they should meet all current standards.

NCAP surveyed 19 conventional pesticides registered since 1997. EPA’s evaluation of these pesticides shows most

of them pose important hazards.⁶ Seven cause cancer and six cause genetic damage. One causes miscarriages, one causes birth defects, one causes cataracts, one causes bone marrow abnormalities, two are neurotoxic, and one causes liver and kidney damage. Eight are toxic to fish; five to juvenile fish and three to adult fish. Five have the characteristics of groundwater contaminants. Two are highly toxic to oysters, and one to shrimp.

Clearly these pesticides are far from “safe” by any common-sense definition.

References

1. *Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act* (FIFRA) § 3(c)(5).
2. *Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act* § 408(b)(2)(B).
3. FIFRA § 4.
4. FIFRA § 3(c)(1)(D).
5. 40 *Code of Federal Regulations* § 158.340.
6. NCAP’s survey of recently registered pesticides is based on EPA’s “Factsheets on New Active Ingredients” available at www.epa.gov/opprd001/factsheets/. The pesticides are azoxystrobin, carfentrazone-ethyl, clofencet, cloransulan-methyl, cymoxanil, cyprodinil, diflufenopyr, dimethomorph, flufenacet, fluroxypr, imazamox, imiprothrin, isoxaflutole, kresoxim-methyl, propazine, sulfentrazone, thiazopyr, and tralkoxydim.

