

15. On the Trail of Pesticides In Your Community

Objectives: • To study and get involved in a pesticide issue in your community.

Activities:

- Because pesticides are used in so many ways, there will almost certainly be some issues in your community that you can choose to investigate and get involved in. Start by researching pesticides via the index of your local newspaper, your phone directory, your own observations about your community, or a call or visit to a local environmental organization. You may want to read sections of *The Reporter's Environmental Handbook* (Bernadette West et al., Rutgers University Press, 1995) for ideas. This publication has sections on investigating air pollution, birth defects, cancer cluster claims, chemical emergencies, endangered species, hazardous waste, occupational exposure to toxic chemicals, pesticides, water pollution, and more. Consider:

Pesticide manufacturing facilities

Agricultural pesticide drift

Hazardous waste disposal sites, dumps or incinerators

Urban pesticide use (e.g., in parks, on lawns)

Pesticide spray programs (e.g., pest eradication programs, mosquito abatement programs, roadside spray programs)

Pesticide transportation (e.g. via railroads, highways)

- Research the issue you choose, and then take steps to publicize your findings and use them to change a pesticide policy, use or disposal practice in your area.
- If you are interested in investigating the potential human health impacts of pesticide pollution, be sure to get a copy of *The Health Detective's Handbook: A Guide to the Investigation of Environmental Health Hazards by Nonprofessionals*, edited by Marvin Legator, and published in 1985 by The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- For more ideas, refer to the inspiring model student projects listed below.

Resources:

- *Heptachlor In Hawaii* (37:25 minute video), documents a student pesticide research project at Stevenson Intermediate School in Honolulu. The students examine previous heptachlor contamination of milk in Hawaii, the sources of the problem, and how it was being addressed. They interview government officials, scientists, and more. Available from Hawaii Heptachlor Research and Education Foundation, 1188 Bishop St., Suite 2308. Honolulu, HI, 96813. A teacher's guide is also available.

- Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP)
PO Box 1393
Eugene, OR 97440
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The following articles are available from NCAP:

- "Like Climbing Mountains: The Children's Cleanup Crusade." *Journal of Pesticide Reform* 9(3):24-27. Describes a 4th-6th grade student project that prompted an EPA investigation and cleanup of a hazardous waste site in Salt Lake City.
- "Engaging Students in the Political Process." A brief *NYCAP News* article (Fall 94) describing the project of two Southern Cayuga Central High School students investigating the effects of roadside spraying on a local lake. The project resulted in proposed legislation.
- "Students demand milk in unbleached cartons." Describes the (unsuccessful) project of a group of high school students who (with the help of a local law clinic) petitioned their state Department of Education to get unbleached milk cartons used in school lunch programs. [One common paper bleaching process uses chlorine and creates dioxins, leaving trace residues of these highly toxic compounds in the paper, and also in the waste water that flows into rivers downstream from pulp and paper mills.]