

Statement of Marcia Clark

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April 4, 2000

Pesticides pose health risks to children and to adults when they are used in school settings. I know: some colleagues and I were recent victims of pesticide applications at the Wilsonville elementary school where I work.

This February, unbeknownst to most of the school staff and parents, one wing of our building was sprayed over the President's Day weekend with three different pesticides in an effort to control ants in a first grade classroom. The area was to be ventilated on the Monday holiday; on Sunday, at least one teacher went into the school to catch-up on lesson preparation and entered an unventilated area. She suffered an immediate asthma attack, and also developed a headache, blisters on her tongue and gums, and a metallic taste in her mouth.

On Tuesday, when I entered my building, I smelled a chemical immediately. When I entered a classroom adjacent to the one with the ants, I noticed an overwhelming odor and became dizzy and nauseous. I had an immediate headache. After working with students in this room for a half hour, I had a pounding headache and my voice was hoarse. Several others reported sore throats and eye irritation. By Thursday, I was home to recuperate; I later heard that half of a first grade classroom in that wing went home with "strep throat."

It was only later that we learned that this part of the school had been sprayed with pesticides. Our reactions were still strong five to six days after the application. As late as March 30th, I felt renewed symptoms when I went outside for recess duty. Apparently, the warm sun had reactivated the chemicals.

I have now learned that it is common for pesticides to be applied at schools without parents or school staff being notified, and without warning notices being posted. Pesticide applications apparently are considered "routine maintenance." I believe this is wrong, and that we have a right to know when toxic chemicals are used in our workplaces and schools. If we had been notified in advance, we could have taken precautions. I would never have taken my students into a room that had been treated with toxic chemicals; children should never have been exposed. Most of the parents of children who were taken out of school with sore throats that week probably still have no idea that their children were exposed to toxic pesticides.

Our school's administrators told us that they didn't have time to experiment with different kinds of chemicals and that they believed they could rely on EPA registration as an indication of a pesticide's safety. Clearly this was not a good assumption.

I join teachers and staff at my school in support of the important recommendations that NCAP has offered in this new report. Pesticides pose hazards to children and school staff. It is time for school districts everywhere to recognize these hazards and to adopt policies to minimize the use of toxic chemicals. Schools also need to notify parents and school staff in advance in those few cases when pesticide use might be justified.