

## Statement of Becky Riley

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Our important new report, *Unthinkable Risk*, documents that children are exposed and are harmed when pesticides are used at school. This report documents nearly 100 actual school pesticide exposure incidents, and cites additional reviews showing that literally thousands of children and school staff have been made ill from pesticide exposure at schools around the country. Evidence described in this report also shows that school pesticide exposures have been linked to serious and life-threatening conditions such as acute poisoning, anaphylactic reactions, asthma attacks, and abnormal heart rhythms.

Pesticides are poisons intended to kill unwanted living organisms. A growing body of scientific and medical evidence suggests that children are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of pesticides. Despite this, these toxic chemicals remain in widespread use in and around schools.

The reality is that nearly anywhere that pesticides are used, unavoidable contamination occurs. Pesticide residues can be surprisingly persistent in both indoor and outdoor environments. When pesticides are used in a school, or on a school ground, children and other school occupants face unavoidable exposures.

Our children spend long hours of their young lives in school environments. It is our responsibility to ensure that our schools provide the safest learning environment for all students.

What can we do about this problem? School and health officials and government regulators have acted to ensure that children are not exposed to lead, asbestos, or cigarette smoke at schools. Similar steps are urgently needed to ensure that children are not exposed to pesticides at school. Even one childhood cancer, or one child whose ability to learn is impaired by pesticide exposure is too many. NCAP urges school districts (and state and federal policymakers) everywhere to adopt the following principles:

- 1) The Precautionary Principle.** Recognize that any use of pesticides in a school setting poses risks and that minimizing or eliminating their use should be a formal and stated goal.
- 2) Put Children's Health and Safety First.** Consider the use of pesticides only if pests themselves pose a health and safety hazard, not for cosmetic or nuisance pests.
- 3) Eliminate the Most Hazardous Pesticides.** Do NOT use pesticides if animal testing, human exposure incidents, or other reliable evidence shows that the product or its constituent ingredients are: highly acutely toxic, pose environmental risks, are known or suspected to cause cancer or to damage the reproductive, nervous, immune or endocrine (hormone) systems; or are known to aggravate allergies, asthma, or chemical sensitivities. Do NOT use pesticides unless all solvents and other "inert" ingredients are disclosed.
- 4) Honor the Public Right to Know:** Keep records of all pesticide use, and provide public access to the records, and to product labels and Material Safety Data Sheets. Provide advance written and posted notification if pesticides are to be used.