

Statement of Maye Thompson, RN

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As a nurse and a mother, it is very disturbing to think that when I send my children off to school, I might be sending them into a building or onto a playing field that has been sprayed with chemicals that can make them sick, affect their brains and learning ability, or even cause cancer.

As NCAP's new report documents, pesticide residues can remain in soil or carpeting for surprisingly long periods. Young children roll on the school lawn and play in dirt and even put things in their mouths. Indoors, they sit on floors and lay on carpets. That's what kids do. School grounds and school classrooms are not the place to be using hazardous chemicals. Sanitation is the best way to control most indoor "pests," and no toxic residues remain to contaminate the environment. Outdoors, the priority should be children's health and safety, not what the grass looks like or whether there are weeds in the shrub beds.

As a registered nurse, I am especially concerned about the use of pesticides in schools in an effort to control head lice. Many schools still spray classroom carpets and furniture for head lice, despite the fact that federal agencies, including the US Centers for Disease Control, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Pediculosis Association, have had long-standing recommendations against this practice. These agencies say that spraying for head lice is not effective, unnecessarily contaminates the indoor environment, and wastes money.

I am also concerned about the rising rates of childhood asthma, and the fact that children with asthma may be more susceptible to pesticides and solvents. Ironically, people sometimes argue that pesticide use is necessary to protect children from pests such as cockroaches or dust mites, which are known to have the potential to trigger allergic asthmatic reactions. However, the pesticides themselves can trigger allergic or asthmatic reactions. Also, a new study showed that animals exposed to a widely-used insecticide experienced increased allergic responses to dust mites. Vacuuming, sanitation, and avoiding exposures to pesticides and other toxic products are the safest and best ways to protect children from substances that can trigger asthma attacks.

I am pleased to speak on behalf on District #1 of the Oregon Nurses Association, and join with NCAP in calling on school districts to adopt policies that call for minimizing the use of pesticides in classrooms and on school grounds. The many incidents documented in this new report show that it is high time for action. I hope that parents and school administrators everywhere, including here in Portland, will heed the recommendations in this report, and act today to adopt the precautionary principle when it comes to pesticide use at school.

I also urge Oregon state legislators and federal policymakers to ban the use of the most hazardous pesticides at schools, and to require that schools post and provide advance notification if pesticides are used in school settings. These common sense measures need to be taken today, before any more children are harmed.