

What is an inert ingredient in a pesticide?

According to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, the U.S. pesticide law, inert ingredient “means an ingredient which is not active.” An active ingredient is one that will “prevent, destroy, repel, or mitigate any pest.”

Are inert ingredients hazardous?

Despite their name, inert ingredients in pesticides are neither chemically, biologically or toxicologically inert. For example, the solvents naphthalene and xylene are used as inert ingredients. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health’s Registry of Toxic Effects of Chemical Substances, exposure to naphthalene in laboratory toxicology studies has caused severe skin irritation; genetic damage in insects, hamster cells, and human blood cells; developmental abnormalities in offspring and reduced newborn survival when exposure occurs during pregnancy; and cancer, including lymphoma. Exposure to xylene in laboratory toxicology studies has caused severe eye irritation; developmental abnormalities in offspring when exposure occurred during pregnancy; reduced fertility; abortion; and hearing problems.

Are inert ingredients identified on pesticide labels?

No. The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act requires only that pesticide labels identify the name and percentage of each active ingredient. There is currently no similar requirement for inert ingredients.

Are inert ingredients included in the health and safety testing required for pesticides?

Most of the tests required to register a pesticide are done on the active ingredient only. This includes tests for important health problems, like cancer, birth defects, and genetic damage.

A coalition of health and environmental groups has just petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to require that more inert ingredients be identified on pesticide labels. What groups are in the coalition?

Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, Agricultural Resources Center / Pesticide Education Project, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, American Bird Conservancy, Beyond Pesticides, Californians for Alternatives to Toxics, Californians for Pesticide Reform, Center for Environmental Health, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Environmental Working Group, Grassroots Environmental Education, Migrant Clinicians Network, Natural Resources Defense Council, North American Hazardous Materials Management Association, New Jersey Environmental Federation, Pesticide Action Network North America, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Safer Pest Control Project, The Endocrine Disruption Exchange, Texans for Alternatives to Pesticides, Toxics Information Project, and Washington Toxics Coalition

Fifteen Attorneys General submitted a companion petition to EPA. What Attorneys General are these?

New York, Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and U.S. Virgin Islands.

What inert ingredients do the petitions ask EPA to identify on pesticide labels?

The petitions ask EPA to require that pesticide labels identify inert ingredients that have been classified as hazardous under a variety of health and environmental statutes including the Clean Air Act, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, the Clean Water Act, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, and the Toxic Substances Control Act, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act.