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Press Kit: <http://www.beyondtoxics.org/resources/press-kit/>

For more background about the issue of pesticides in Oregon's private forests, go to:

www.beyondtoxics.org/work/pesticide-reform/forestry-pesticide-project/



News Release

Attorney General Upholds Public Records Request for Pesticide Documents

Request filed by environmental health group, Beyond Toxics, for public access to documents concerning pesticide exposure sickening Gold Beach area residents

EUGENE, ORE. — On March 20, the Oregon Attorney General agreed with Beyond Toxics, a statewide public health advocacy organization, about whether the public must be granted access to records held by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The records requested by the group concerned an incident on October 16, 2013, when herbicides sprayed by helicopters used by private timber operators fell upon residents in Cedar Valley, a rural suburb of Gold Beach. The formal public records request was made on January 27, but the Department denied access to them.

Responding to reports of a sudden onset of serious health symptoms by nearly two dozen people, Beyond Toxics sought to obtain the records to share with those affected and their doctors. It has been five months since the spray incident that sent rural residents rushing to emergency rooms and doctors' offices; it also caused one horse to go blind in one eye and more horses and dogs to become seriously debilitated. Despite repeated requests from health professionals and sickened residents, state agencies have not been forthcoming.

According to media coverage in the Associated Press and local newspapers, Cedar Valley residents' complaints began after helicopters flew over their property, causing them to be overcome by a strong chemical odor. Almost immediately, over twenty people, including young children, experienced severe headaches, blurry vision, loss of balance, nausea, rashes and respiratory constriction.

Beyond Toxics' Executive Director, Lisa Arkin, filed the complaint with the Attorney General. When the positive decision from the Attorney General arrived, she stated, "We are buoyed by the decision we received today – it's a win for public access and proper disclosure."

"State agencies must comply with Oregon's laws determining the public's right to access public documents, especially in a case where human health is at stake." Arkin said. "It doesn't help the people who are suffering and spending a lot of money on doctor and veterinary bills for public agencies to keep this kind of information secret."

Beyond Toxics was assisted by the Crag Law Center, a public interest environmental law firm in Portland. Chris Winter, Co-Executive Director stated, ""The Department's job is to protect the public and regulate pesticide applicators, not the other way around. The public has a right to know the job is done right."

The people of Cedar Valley also found support amongst health professionals in other parts of the state who were surprised that their colleagues were unable to obtain any information on pesticide spray ingredients to base their treatment of patients. Director of the Lane County Medical Society, Candice Barr, said, "This opinion is really great news for those who care about public health, which of course should be everyone."

The Lane County Medical Society Board of Directors had voted earlier to support efforts to ensure that all medical professionals and their patients can be granted immediate access to pesticide spray records in the event of a poisoning exposure.

Federal agencies have also become involved in the Gold Beach pesticide exposure investigation. Federal experts are overseeing the state agency's inquiry after residents of Gold Beach and Beyond Toxics filed a December, 2013 petition to the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control seeking their help.