

Physicians: State rules for spraying inadequate

By Jane Stebbins
Pilot staff writer

Physicians in Lane County say the state's new standard operating procedures adopted this summer in light of aerial sprays over Gold Beach a year ago are woefully inadequate and need more teeth.

"We should work down from excellence, rather than up from mediocrity," said Lane County Public Health Director Patrick Luedtke, in a letter to the Senate Environmental and Natural Resources Committee this fall, regarding the May draft of the new procedures. "This document does not start from a place of excellence."

Citizens in Cedar Valley, near Gold Beach, who fell ill after being sprayed by chemicals last October are working with residents of Triangle Lake in Lane County, who have been fighting to strengthen laws regarding chemical sprays for years.

In 2013, doctors here were baffled when they couldn't treat their patients because they couldn't obtain information from the state or the chemical spraying company regarding what was sprayed on the residents and their property.

Some developed rashes and coughs that have yet to go away. Some were vomiting blood, and others developed asthma. A dog had to be euthanized after it shed too much weight in the months following the spraying. A horse was blinded.

months, Arkin said, it was learned that the Oregon Department of Agriculture kept the names of the herbicides secret for nearly seven months; the Department of Environmental Quality refused to analyze water samples to assure people their drinking water was safe, and the state Department of Forestry could not figure out which applicator had done the spraying because the law does not require accurate and timely record keeping by forestry operators.

And those affected by the spray were not improving.

Meyers noted in his letter that typically doctors call Poison Control, where expert medical treatment advice is available 24/7.

"The PARC board is not staffed by medical professionals and would not be the entity to turn to for efficient and quality patient care consultation," he said.

Under the May draft copy of the standard operating procedures (SOP), a doctor must submit a request — in writing — asking for information pertaining to a chemical in such an exposure. All requests will be handled in a "timely and efficient manner," the SOP reads. The request is then forwarded to the state Department of Agriculture's pesticide program manager or the lead pesticide investigator, either of whom might need to enlist the help of the Oregon Department of Forestry's field support

"An emergency room or primary care physician may see 20 to 30 patients per day, and may have as little as 15 minutes to evaluate and treat a patient," wrote Mark Meyers, president of the Lane County Medical Society, which represents 800 physicians there. "We need information in real time."

Numerous agencies were involved in the investigation in Cedar Valley — but it was days after the spraying. They included the state Department of Agriculture, Department of Forestry, Health Authority, Department of Fish and Wildlife, DEQ and the Pesticide Analytical Response Center (PARC).

That agency was established to collect information regarding pesticide incidents, mobilize crews for investigations into them, identify trends and patterns in problem areas, make recommendations for change, and prepare reports for legislative sessions.

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or policy and monitoring manager, the three-page document reads.

If the form is received on a weekend, PARC officials will get back to the doctor on the next regularly scheduled workday.

And if it is an emergency, the new SOPs read, the health care provider "should contact Poison Control immediately."

That, however, requires the doctors have some clue as to what their patients were sprayed with, and they couldn't because state law does not require applicator companies to divulge that information.

Additionally, PARC "does not possess the statutory authority to request pesticide use information from licensed applicators."

It was months before the state agencies finally divulged what was in the mist that fell on the residents of Cedar Valley: 2,4-D, used in Agent Orange and triclopyr, an endocrine disruptor found in RoundUp.

