

Chemical Sprays Continue Sickening Rural Residents

ARTICLE | DECEMBER 26, 2013 - 12:00AM | BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

“Why do they treat people as if they are the problem?” asks Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics. She says residents of Gold Beach and Cedar Valley in Curry County who have been experiencing health problems from an Oct. 16 aerial spray of pesticides are being treated as if they, not the spraying of toxics, are the problem.

Arkin cites instances in which doctors and health professionals trying to treat people in Curry County for symptoms after the spray — including severe headaches, blurry vision, loss of balance, nausea, rashes and chest constriction — had not gotten calls back as of Dec. 12 to tell them what was in the “chemical soup” that was sprayed. The Curry County residents have joined with other communities west of the Cascades troubled by aerial spraying of pesticides over private forestlands to petition federal agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency and Centers for Disease Control to investigate the affects of the sprays and put a moratorium on their use.

Dale Mitchell of the Oregon Department of Agriculture says ODA cannot comment on the Curry County spray because there is an open investigation into the incident the agency does not want to compromise.

According to the petition, one helicopter, possibly two, made at least eight trips and pesticides were sprayed over streams that are the drinking water source for nearby homes. While Oregon has minimal buffer zones for fishbearing streams when spraying on private lands, Arkin says, there are no buffers for schools and nearby private property. While sprays are supposed to be kept on the property being sprayed, Arkin points out that without buffers, there is no way users can keep the toxic sprays from drifting onto the homes of their neighbors. Idaho and Washington have bigger and better buffers than Oregon, she says.

Arkin also points out that applicators don't just spray one chemical, they spray what she calls a “toxic soup” of various pesticides mixed together. While doctors did not get an answer to what was sprayed in Curry County, a vet calling about a dog that got sick from the spray was told the chemical soup included glyphosate, imazapyr, metsulfuron methyl, triclopyr, 2,4-D and crop oil. In addition to the human illness, horses and other pets were also affected by the spray, and Arkin says one dog is about to be euthanized due to the toxic effects.

Beyond Toxics recently released a report called “Oregon’s Industrial Forests and Herbicide Use: A Case Study of Risk to People, Drinking Water and Salmon” that concludes the “Oregon Forest Practices Act is inadequate to protect human health, drinking water and all surface water.”

The Beyond Toxics report stems from the federal investigation into pesticide sprays along Hwy. 36 at Triangle Lake, outside of Eugene. According to that report, one major company is using tank mixes of three or more herbicides and “by doing so, timber companies increased the amount of herbicides they sprayed in the headwaters of salmon habitat by 99 percent in just three years.”

The report also details how difficult it is for the public to get pesticide spray records or get notified of an impending spray — right now Oregon does not require neighbors to be notified. Timberland owners notify the Oregon Department of Forestry of impending sprays but do not say what chemicals will be used or what days the sprays will happen. People can pay a fee to get those notifications. Local group Forestland Dwellers collects these notifications and *EW* runs them in this section most weeks as “Lane County Area Spray Schedule.”

About the Author »



Camilla Mortensen

Associate Editor and Reporter

Camilla Mortensen is associate editor and reporter at *Eugene Weekly*. She is also a folklorist and a community college and university instructor. She has two horses, an assortment of dogs, and lives in a 1975 Airstream trailer.

Sometimes all these details collide in unforeseen ways.