



NO MORE TOXIC SCHOOLS?

Back in 2008 Beyond Toxics (then Oregon Toxics Alliance) did research on the dangers of using toxic pesticides on school grounds. The organization tracked issues such as how many schools had to be evacuated and how many kids were sent home sick from toxic exposures. As a result in 2009 the Oregon Legislature passed a bill that ensures Oregon private and public schools K-12 as well as community colleges

must first look to nonchemical means of controlling pests. This new policy starts in July, but schools and government agencies are getting ready for the transition now.

According to the Beyond Toxics report, children are uniquely vulnerable to harm from pesticides while they are growing and developing. It cites instances of kids being exposed to pesticides at bus stops and on playing fields.

Some school districts, such as Eugene 4J, already use integrated pest management (IPM) to control weeds and pests and protect schoolchildren, but the

rest of Lane County's kids, and most kids in Oregon, have not been protected from pesticides at their schools.

Lisa Arkin, executive director of Beyond Toxics, says the bill came out of a legislative working group, led by Suzanne Bonamici, just elected to the congressional seat vacated by David Wu. Arkin says the group included educators, everyday people affected by pesticides — including people from Triangle Lake who are still fighting pesticide sprays in that area — as well as people who represented pesticide industry interests.

Arkin calls Oregon's new rules "one of the strongest pieces of legislation protecting children on school grounds in the nation."

According to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, schools are starting to gear up now for the switch to reduced use of toxics in everything from bug control to weed control. OSU is doing outreach to schools that might need help with the switch, and ODA is working with pesticide applicators.

ODA says, "If done correctly, IPM not only reduces the use of pesticides but is actually more effective at ridding the pest problem." ODA stresses that IPM doesn't remove pesticides from a school's toolbox in specific situations.

Arkin agrees, pointing out that if a kid stepped on a hornet nest, a school would be able to use a pesticide to get rid of the hornets. But no chemical can be used when children are on the premises, she says.

She says, "We think the definition of IPM used in the school law should be incorporated into other state laws" and protect people from toxic exposure on public roadways and in government buildings, an issue Beyond Toxics is working on in its Safe Public Places campaign.

— Camilla Mortensen

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