

A Road to Paradise Soaked with Poisons CONTINUED

It turns out that the “stuff” that was sprayed from the government truck was Outpost 22K, which is 24% picloram, an herbicide whose use is restricted. According to Dow Chemical, the manufacturer, “it is known to leach through soils into ground water, and may result in ground water contamination.”

INVESTIGATION REVEALS POISONING

That was in 2010. Since then, many La Pine neighbors reported similar problems. The Oregon Department of Agriculture started an investigation in November 2011. Despite taking soil, drinking water and foliage samples a full 16 months after the spray occurred, picloram was found at unusually high levels on a number of residential properties. The sandy pumice soil of Central Oregon is the primary aquifer in the La Pine area, and most domestic wells are within 50 feet of the surface. This aquifer serves as the sole source of drinking water for these residents.

Giant trees — many over 250 years-old — are withering away. Over 100 lodgepole and Ponderosa pines perished on a single property. New plantings grow in crooked shapes, or just can't survive. For a year after the spray, children suffered from incessant nosebleeds and nausea. And people continue to feel sick. Adults still experience metabolic disorders, memory loss and muscle weakness.

Amazingly, this devastation occurred because Klamath County government, using public money, sprayed toxics to kill just one unwelcomed plant: spotted knapweed. In fact, the investigation determined Klamath County Public Works and their pesticide contractor were guilty of violating federal pesticide laws. Each was fined over \$7,000, a trivial sum given the consequences to the community. Both are appealing the fine. However, the state's investigative report notes, “Impacts from pesticide contamination to water have long been of particular concern to natural resource stewards and society in general...with its implications for potential human health impacts.”

THE SITUATION TODAY

Two and a half years later, these Oregonians are still suffering. With permeable pumice soils and shallow groundwater wells, there is constant concern that picloram will continue to move through the aquifer



Photo by Douglas McGowan

Denare's surviving dogs continue to lose weight and shed clumps of fur.

to poison drinking water. Many of the families in this area are either lower-middle class, retirees, or veterans struggling with ongoing health issues. Being forced to buy bottled water is a hardship.

With little money to spare, residents have had to assume all of the costs of tree and soil removal, water supplies, and medical care.

Tears well up in Denare's eyes as she looks at the yard that was once a lush garden. She thinks about the dead dog and the chickens, but mostly about her three-year old grandson. She wonders what chemical burden his small body might be carrying. She also worries about her daughter, who is five months pregnant with a second grandchild and lives with her. And she worries about her neighbors. “They confided in me because I'm a nurse. Their symptoms were eerily similar: the nosebleeds, coughs, colds and flus that never seemed to go away.”

Shamefully, Klamath County remains unresponsive to the plight of area residents. Last summer the community reached out to Beyond Toxics for help.

Beyond Toxics' staff traveled to northern Klamath County in September to document the scope of the situation and witness the damage first-hand.

Dan Harshbarger, a veteran of the Vietnam War, gave us a tour. Dan told me that many Vietnam vets experienced the effects of picloram when the U.S. military sprayed the jungles with Agent White along with Agent Orange and other forest defoliants. (Agent White is a 4:1 mixture of 2,4-D and picloram.) When picloram was found in the soil and well water on Dan's property, he called it “chemical trespass” because the herbicide that was sprayed along the edge of his property traveled through the sandy soil directly to the roots of his trees and into his well. He was forced to cut down dozens of dying, mature trees and burn them in huge mounds. This year, he planted a vegetable garden but can't help wondering if eating the produce is safe.

He is emphatic when he says, “We must prevent this kind of recklessness from ever happening again. Endangering the general public is not acceptable ... for any reason.”

Jennifer Meinike, a mother of two, told us, “It's unsettling enough to see these towering trees die one by one, but how are these chemicals affecting the health of my children? We drank the contaminated well water for almost a year before it was tested and found to have picloram in it. If there were symptoms of pesticide poisoning so soon after the spray, what about the long-term effects?”

OUR FINDINGS

Our own investigation uncovered that state and federal grant funding was used to pay for the Klamath County spray operation under the Oregon Department of Agriculture's noxious weed program. There are numerous sources of funding for



Dan Harshbarger
of the trees on

Safe Public Places

As the stories that appear here make plain, pesticides are a public and environmental health problem, linked to tragic disease and environmental damage. That's why, in 2009, Beyond Toxics spearheaded the Oregon law to reduce toxic pesticides at all Oregon schools.

We feel the State of Oregon should do the same for all public places. If the schools can do it, so can state agencies.

Our state has a responsibility to reduce pesticide use to protect our health, preserve the environment and ensure our rivers support salmon and provide safe drinking water.

You Can Do Your Part

There are three ways to get involved:

1) Go to: www.SafePublicPlaces.org to sign our **Safe Public Places Endorsement Form** to join the statewide momentum. We need you on the team!



2) Please join our campaign for sensible pesticide reduction laws by becoming a member.

3) We're collecting pesticide exposure stories to present to the Oregon State Legislature. You can help by calling or writing to us.

Won't you join us in imagining and working for a world Beyond Toxics?

Please get involved! We need your membership and your voice to be an effective advocate for Oregon.

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