More Than 42,000 People and 51 Groups in 18 States Ask EPA to Protect Kids From Pesticides

Sign on to petition for long term protections, immediate no-spray buffer zones where kids live, learn, play

LINDSAY, CA -- Genoveva Galvez knows there are pesticides inside her 14-year-old body. What she really wants to know is this: how does she get rid of them?

Genoveva and her family live surrounded by orange and olive trees in this small Central Valley town. When the cropdusters spray nearby, the sticky smell burns their eyes and sends them reeling indoors.

Nearly a billion pounds of pesticides are sprayed in fields and orchards across the country each year. But as families like Genoveva's can tell you: those pesticides don't always stay where they're sprayed.

That's why some 42,000 people and 51 groups in 18 states have publicly supported a petition asking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to set safety standards protecting children who grow up near farms from the harmful effects of pesticide 'drift' -- the toxic spray or vapor that travels from treated fields into nearby yards. The petition also asks the agency to immediately adopt no-spray buffer zones around homes, schools, parks and daycare centers for the most dangerous and drift-prone pesticides.

The deadline for public comment on the petition before EPA was midnight Friday.

"When farm workers come home after a long day in the fields and orchards, they're faced with yet another worry - the poisons that are settling in their homes, their lawns, their children's bodies," said Erik Nicholson, National Vice President of United Farm Workers. "We can't let another growing season go by. That's why more than 42,000 people and dozens of organizations are asking EPA to put an end to this today.'"

In 1996, Congress required EPA to set standards by 2006 to protect children from pesticides. Four years have passed since that deadline, and EPA's job is only partially complete. The agency has made some progress -- banning the use of some pesticides in the home and on lawns. But the agency has failed to protect children from these same pesticides when they drift from treated fields into nearby yards, homes, schools, parks and daycare centers.

"In farming communities throughout the country, children have been abandoned by federal pesticide protections," said Earthjustice attorney Janette Brimmer. "Tens of thousands of Americans and dozens of organizations are asking EPA to finish the job it started so children who live, learn, and play near farms and orchards are kept safe from poisonous pesticides.'"

EPA has acknowledged the risk of pesticide drift, but still chose to go ahead with a double-standard: protecting urban and suburban areas, while leaving the children of farm workers and other rural kids vulnerable.

"We traditionally think of farms as healthy places," said MomsRising.org President Joan Blades. "But children and families across the country are being poisoned by pesticides that travel from the fields into their houses and bedrooms, causing serious and long-lasting damage to their health. We already have standards barring the use of such pesticides for homes and lawns to protect children. But all children deserve such protection. You shouldn't have to live in the suburbs to be safe from deadly pesticides.'"

"It's time the EPA put an end to this double-standard for farm workers. The public has made it clear: EPA's policies must protect farm workers and their children from unnecessary poisoning," said Farmworker Justice attorney Virginia Ruiz.

Pesticide poisoning reports and scientific studies show that pesticides are ending up in the air and in people's bodies at unsafe levels. Among a host of examples: air monitoring conducted near the Southwoods Elementary School in Hastings, Florida, detected pesticides in every sample, sometimes at levels that may pose serious health risks to young children.
“Children are especially vulnerable to pesticide exposures both because their smaller bodies cannot break down toxins as well as adults, and because their developmental processes are prone to being derailed – even by very low-level exposure,” explains Karl Tupper, Staff Scientist for Pesticide Action Network. “The particular pesticides we’re finding in our drift catching and biomonitoring results are some of the worst: chlorpyrifos, diazinon, endosulfan...these are associated with serious short- and long-term health effects. They are also entirely unnecessary.”

One of the pesticides identified as being so dangerous that the groups have asked EPA to adopt immediate no-spray buffer zone is chlorpyrifos – among a class of pesticides that was initially developed as nerve toxins by the Nazis. The short term effects of exposure to chlorpyrifos have been likened to a chemically-induced flu: chest tightness, blurred vision, headaches, coughing and wheezing, weakness, nausea and vomiting, coma, seizures, and even death.

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Background Information:

A link to a video featuring Genoveva Galvez and other children affected by pesticide drift is here: http://www.youtube.com/earthjustice#p/u/0/MkkDSKj1kbI

More stories and resources on pesticide drift are available here: http://www.earthjustice.org/pesticides

A copy of the petition filed in October is available here: http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal_docs/petition-pesticides-in-th...

A fact sheet with background information on the petition is available here: http://www.earthjustice.org/library/factsheets/pesticides_kid_factsheet....

A fact sheet detailing the specific health risks linked to pesticide exposure is available here: http://www.panna.org/node/2392

A background piece on the science behind pesticide drift is available here: http://www.panna.org/drift/science

The four-page (PDF) results of Hastings, FL drift-catcher results are available here: http://www.panna.org/files/hastingsFLSum20080923.pdf

Also available for interviews:

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