

# NEWS RELEASE



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## Oregon Public Health study finds most pesticide poisonings occur at home

Most pesticide poisonings occur in the home, according to a new report released today by the Oregon Public Health Division.

The study, "Descriptive Analysis of PEST Cases, 2002-2007," provides surprising information, according to the author, Justin Waltz, M.P.H.

"It was thought that most pesticide poisonings likely happened in a work situation or on a farm. This new information about at-home poisonings points to a need for more education and awareness for all of us regarding the dangers of pesticide exposure," said Waltz, coordinator of the Pesticide Exposure Safety and Tracking (PEST) program.

A few simple safety tips could prevent harmful exposures: Read the label on the pesticide container; use recommended protective equipment; and store the pesticide appropriately.

The study analyzed 1,038 cases; of those 689 were found to have a likely connection between the reported symptoms and a pesticide exposure. One exposure resulted in the person's death. The report found:

- More than two-thirds of reported harmful exposures and events happened in the home and most are believed to be the result of misuse or accidental release of pesticides.
- Pesticide applications to buildings or houses to rid structures of pests such as weeds, bacteria, rodents, birds or deer account for the largest proportion -- 22 percent of harmful pesticide incidents.

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- Some rural counties -- Sherman, Morrow, Wheeler and Malheur -- show a higher proportion of reported acute pesticide exposures and adverse health effects.
- Physician reports of pesticide poisonings have steadily declined despite the fact that such poisonings are a reportable condition under Oregon law.
- Most pesticide poisonings in the workplace happened to workers who were not directly working with pesticides or pesticide equipment. For example, a 2005 incident involved a single pesticide application that sickened five emergency workers.

Pesticide exposure reports come from a variety of sources. However, more than 80 percent are from the Oregon Poison Center.

It is important to note that these reported cases do not represent a complete accounting of all acute pesticide exposures in Oregon. Nationally, it is known that pesticide exposures are unrecognized and unreported and this is also likely the case in Oregon, according to Waltz.

The report contains extensive demographic information about pesticide exposure cases. For example:

- The largest number of exposures occurred to people ages 40 to 49 and were almost evenly split between men and women.
- Respiratory and eye symptoms were those most frequently reported, followed closely by neurological and gastrointestinal symptoms.
- One exposure was classified as resulting in death.
- A monthly breakdown shows that most exposures occur in July.

The Oregon Environmental Public Health Tracking Program is beginning to work with other states and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop systematic methods of measuring pesticide releases into a community and the health outcomes of residents.

Several diseases have been linked to pesticide exposure, especially over long-term exposures. However, it is difficult to connect a specific illness with past pesticide exposure because people are affected by many other substances throughout their lifetimes. There are also genetic factors to consider.

Oregonians who believe they have symptoms of an urgent nature resulting from a pesticide exposure should first contact the Oregon Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 or their health care provider. Non-urgent reports can be made to the Oregon Public Health Division at 971-673-0440 or the Pesticide Analytical Response Center at 503-986-6470.

The complete report can be found on the PEST Program website:  
[www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pesticide/](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pesticide/)