

Home Pesticide Safety

Lee S. Yudin

College of Natural and Applied Sciences

Pesticides are chemical substances used to kill or greatly reduce pests. For example, insecticides are used to control insects, herbicides are used to eliminate weeds, and rodenticides are used to kill mice and rats. The misuse of these chemicals can be extremely dangerous to humans and to our environment.

Pesticides can enter the body in four major ways: oral exposure (when a pesticide is swallowed), inhalation exposure (when a pesticide is inhaled), ocular exposure (when a pesticide gets into the eyes), and dermal exposure (when pesticide gets onto the skin). Pesticide poisoning most commonly occurs in children under five years of age. A simple rule that will help reduce the risk of the number of pesticide poisonings is to **keep all pesticides locked up**.

Below, lists Pesticide Safety Tips that homeowners need to be aware of when storing, using, or disposing of pesticide containers.

- Before using any pesticide, **identify the pest problem**. If in doubt, seek professional assistance for proper identification and control measures. Use the proper pesticide to do the job.
- **Follow label instructions carefully**. The label is meant for user safety. It provides information on protective



clothing and equipment, first aid treatment, environmental hazards, specific use directions, and other vital information.

- **Always read the entire label before using any pesticide.**
- **Wear proper personal protective clothing** (stated on the label) when mixing, handling, or applying pesticides.
- **Never use kitchen utensils** for pesticide measurements or stirring and reuse them for food.
- **Mix only the amount needed** to complete the job. Storing mixed pesticides is not recommended.
- **Never transfer a pesticide to a container** such as a soft drink bottle that would attract children.
- **Never smoke** while mixing, handling, or applying pesticides.
- **Keep children and pets away** from pesticides and areas that have been treated until it is safe to enter. See the label for specific reentry periods.
- **Never spray** outdoors on a windy day.
- If a pesticide comes in contact with skin, hair, or

clothing, **remove contaminated clothing and cleanse skin and hair with soap and water immediately.**

- If a pesticide comes in contact with eyes, **immediately wash out eyes** with cold water for 15 minutes or more. See a doctor if necessary.
- **Never mix clothing worn** when mixing, handling, or applying pesticides with family laundry. Always wash these clothes separately.
- After any pesticide use, it is important to **wash hands and face** before eating, drinking, or smoking.
- **Never store pesticides** near food, feed, seed, fertilizers, or animals.
- **Store pesticides properly** by placing in a cool, dry, well-ventilated building (shed), under lock and key, and in the original container. The storage area should be supplied with detergent, hand cleaner, water, absorbent material (charcoal, sawdust, paper) to soak up any spills, and a fire extinguisher rated for chemical fires.
- **Dispose of empty pesticide container safely.** Always rinse out empty containers (metal, plastic, or glass) three times. “Home Use” pesticide containers may be safely disposed of by wrapping them individually with newspaper and placing in a covered trash can.
- **In case of pesticide poisoning,** refer to the pesticide label immediately or first aid treatment. Then call or go to the doctor or hospital for immediate care. Bring the label to show the doctor. Emergency numbers (doctor, hospital, poison center, or 911) should always be clearly posted in one’s home so anyone can readily call for help.

For more information concerning the use of pesticides or pest-related problems, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service.

This factsheet was part of a series on household insects written for the Pacific Daily News from September 1997 - November 1999. Content has been verified as of January 2017.