

Lane County Medical Society

990 West 7th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97402

(541) 686-0995 || (541) 687-1554

lcms@rioussa.com

January 21, 2015

Senator
900 Court St. NE S-417
Salem, Or. 97301

Re: Legislation to protect Oregonians from toxic herbicides

Dear Senator,

We are writing to seek your help in protecting Oregon families and clean drinking water by improving the rules that govern aerial spraying of toxic herbicides. The Lane County Medical Society has been following this issue for two years and are troubled by the fact that Oregon lacks inadequate buffer requirements to protect human health and water quality. As health care providers, we find it difficult to accept that, in Oregon, residents who are exposed to toxic chemicals through aerial spraying and their physicians, are unable to access accurate and timely information regarding what they have been subjected to so that they can seek effective treatment.

The Problem

Some 10.5 million acres of forest in Oregon is privately managed under the Forest Practices Act. The Oregon Forest Practices Act allows large scale clear-cutting, followed by multiple herbicide applications to kill both non-native and native plants, unlike management practices in our national forests. These parcels are often the source of public drinking water and adjacent to residential areas. Over thirty years ago, the federal government banned aerial sprays due to evidence of human health harm.

Reliance on aerial herbicide sprays has generated increasing public concern about herbicide exposure, particularly among rural residents who live and work near industrial logging lands. Aerial spraying can allow chemicals with known adverse health effects, such as 2, 4-D, glyphosate and atrazine to drift long distances.

As physicians who care for families, children and pregnant women, we express our concern, which is based on the scientific evidence of harm. The US Environmental Protection Agency states that:

- Children are at a greater risk for some pesticides (herbicides are a class of pesticides).
- Children's internal organs are still developing and maturing and their enzymatic, metabolic, and immune systems provide less natural protection than those of an adult.
- Pesticides may cause harm because a child's excretory system is not fully developed, and thus, a child's body may not fully remove pesticides.
- There are "critical periods" in human development when exposure to a toxin can permanently alter the way an individual's biological system operates.

At one time Oregon had a 500 ft. no-spray buffer for homes, but that requirement was removed in the 1990's. Oregon's current 60-ft. no-spray buffer for domestic drinking water sources is impossible to maintain when chemicals are sprayed from the air.

While providing no protection from aerial herbicide drift, the Oregon Forest Practices Act compounds the risk by not requiring advance notification to rural residents before spraying, providing no opportunity for people with health concerns to leave the area, for school children to be kept indoors during recess, or for residents to take precautions to protect livestock or pets. ***Currently no Oregonian can get access timely, accurate information regarding spraying.***

Senator, we need your help to enact reasonable reforms that would accomplish the following:

1. Establish no-spray buffers around homes and schools.
2. Enhance buffers to protect municipal drinking watersheds, including the tributaries that feed these drinking water systems.
3. Create an advance notification system that would allow members of the public to receive notice about the date and time of a spray, and the herbicides and/or pesticides that will be used, so that they can take steps to limit their exposure to potentially toxic chemicals.
 - Such a system is already in place and working well with regard to field burning in the Willamette Valley, and could provide a model for aerial herbicide spraying notifications.
4. Require that when spraying of herbicides takes place, a report is filed with the Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon Poison Control within 24 hours regarding what chemicals were used, in what quantity, and where they were sprayed.
 - With computer systems available to share accurate data with the Oregon Poison Control Center in real time, patients and physicians would have the opportunity to receive immediate (24/7), free, and expert medical treatment advice and assistance over the telephone in the event of exposure to poisons.
 - Currently, the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Pesticide Analytic Response Center are not staffed by medical professionals, are not available 24/7 and would not be the entities to turn to for efficient and quality patient care consultation.
5. Ensure the Oregon Health Authority is empowered to respond to poisoning emergencies, investigate incidents and conduct studies of human or animal exposure to toxic pesticides and herbicides, in conjunction with other relevant state and/or federal agencies.

We believe these five recommendations could be enacted without imposing any undue burden on logging in Oregon or on the chemical industry. A number of studies, including a 2011 US EPA report, have concluded that other Pacific Northwest states – Washington, Alaska and Idaho – have had stronger standards in place for decades to protect health and drinking water, while still supporting a strong logging industry.

Dr. Patrick Luedtke, Director of Lane County Public Health, indicated in a recent meeting that "we should work down from excellence, rather than up from mediocrity." Oregon is not currently operating from a place of excellence. Oregon's current law fails to protect public health and lags far behind the pesticide exposure safeguards required in neighboring Northwest states. We request and urge you to support legislation that ensures Oregonians have a right to adequate buffers that protect health, homes, schools and waters of the state.

Thank you,

Mark Meyers, President,
Lane County Medical Society

Candice Barr, CEO
Lane County Medical Society