



Pesticides

Where Are They Found?

Pesticides are potential hazards in many buildings because they are widely used to reduce many household pests, including those associated with indoor plants, pets, and wood and woolen products, and because they are tracked in from the outdoors. Pesticides used in and around the home include products to control insects (insecticides), termites (termiticides), rodents (rodenticides), fungi (fungicides), and microbes (disinfectants). Pesticides are produced specifically because they are toxic to specific organisms. Consequently, they have risks as well as benefits, and it is important to use them properly.

Surveys show that 75 percent of homes in the United States use at least one pesticide product indoors per year. Those most often used are insecticides and disinfectants. However, studies suggest that 80 to 90 percent of exposures to pesticides occur indoors and that measurable levels of up to a dozen pesticides have been found in the air inside homes.

What Are the Health Effects?

The health effects associated with pesticide exposure can include irritation to the eyes, nose, and throat; damage to the central nervous system and kidneys; and for some an increased risk of cancer. Exposure to high levels of cyclodiene pesticides, usually due to misapplication, may cause headaches, dizziness, muscle twitching, weakness, tingling sensation, and nausea.

In 2000, the American Association of Poison Control Centers reported that more than 1,294,000 children, 12 years old and younger, were involved in common household pesticide poisonings or exposures. In households with children, almost one-half stored at least one pesticide product within reach of the children.

How Can You Reduce Exposure to Pesticides in Your Home?

To reduce risks when you are using pesticides, take these precautions:

- ✦ Buy only legally-sold, EPA-registered pesticides.
- ✦ Reread the directions on the label each time you use the pesticide and follow the directions carefully.
- ✦ Use only the amount directed, at the time and under the conditions and purpose specified.
- ✦ Use non-chemical methods of pest control when possible.
- ✦ Identify the pest and use a pesticide targeted for that pest.
- ✦ Ventilate the area during and after pesticide use.
- ✦ Dispose of unused pesticides safely.

Questions regarding pesticide use and safety may be referred to the National Pesticide Information Center at (800) 858-PEST.