

Pesticide Notification in Schools

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New State Law

In March 2005, all Michigan parents gained the right to know about pesticide use in their child's school or daycare—before it even happens. Although it has been on the books for over two years, limited public attention has made this law somewhat obscure. Introduced as Public Act 24, this new law basically says that school administrators must notify all parents 48 hours in advance of any pesticide sprays in or around the school.

There will be two methods of notification: The first route of notification is a sign posted at the building entrances that details the date and location of the application, as well as which pests are being targeted. The name and contact information of the person at the school responsible for maintaining such records must also be displayed. Schools may choose one of the following options as the second form of notification: posting in a common area, e-mail, direct contact phone call, written notice sent home with the kids, or website posting.

At the beginning of each school year, the administrator is responsible for sending out a notice describing the two ways that parents will be alerted to school pesticide use. This letter should also let parents know they have the right to be notified by a third route—a written letter—if they choose. Parents that request this service will receive a first-class letter postmarked at least 3 days before a pesticide application.

Safe at School

State law dictates pesticides are not to be sprayed during school hours. Children may not enter a building for at least four hours after pesticides have been sprayed. Some schools may even wait until holiday breaks to spray, which is better. But the chemicals linger. Carpet and other plush objects can trap persistent pesticide residues. Hard surfaces can collect pesticide-laden dust. Without exposure to the outside elements, these chemicals do not break down.

Why Pesticides

All of this attention to pesticides is due to the fact that even though they are legal, no pesticide can be considered safe, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Pesticides can harm the nervous system, immune system, reproductive system, and brain function of people. Many pesticides have been conclusively linked to non-Hodgkins lymphoma and other cancers. Pesticides are also a trigger and root cause of asthma.

Children, in particular, are more susceptible to the harmful effects of pesticides and are more heavily exposed to pesticides than average adults. Pound for pound, children breathe more air than adults. They are also more readily exposed because they are closer to the ground where pesticides are commonly sprayed and they often put their hands in their mouths.

Why Notify

Advance notification allows parents to watch for any signs of adverse reactions, ill health, or unusual behavior. Signing up for written notification lets a school know that parents are concerned about pesticides being used in the schools.