

Agent Orange in Your Backyard: The Harmful Pesticide 2,4-D

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The NRDC has filed suit against the EPA in an attempt to get it to cancel registrations for 2,4-D, which has been linked to hormone interference.

This weekend, I walked the aisles of a large home supply store near my home. Sure enough, on the shelves were an array of weed killers and "weed and feed" products marketed to keep your lawn looking great. My little lawn doesn't look so great. That's partly because my two dogs love it so much -- their playful digging, and the brown patches where they urinate, have marred the perfection of the grass. But I wasn't there to shop for lawn care products; instead, I was hunting for a pesticide known as 2,4-D.

I found it -- in several different products. You can see the photos below.

2,4-D was invented in the chemical boom during World War II, making it one of the oldest pesticides that's still legally on the market today. It was one of the two active ingredients in Agent Orange, the notorious Vietnam War defoliant. Despite decades of scientific studies showing links to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in humans (and Canine Malignant Lymphoma in household dogs), this chemical survives and thrives as one of the top three pesticides sold in the United States today. Newer science shows that it's not just a cancer problem, but that this pesticide interferes with several essential hormones, thereby increasing the risks of birth defects and neurologic damage in children. Studies in Midwest wheat-growing areas (where 2,4-D is heavily used) have shown increased rates of certain birth defects, especially in male children, and lower sperm counts in adults.

Many people don't realize that many weed and feed products contain a toxic pesticide. People also don't realize that after they apply the product to their lawn, the chemical residues are tracked indoors on shoes or pet paws, and contaminate the carpets. Because 2,4-D is broken down by direct sunlight, once the residues get into the house the pesticide lingers for months or even years. Kids who play on the floor are at particular risk, since they accidentally ingest the chemical when they put their hands in their mouths.

2,4-D is used on athletic fields, golf courses, landscaping, timber land, rights-of-way, and various crops. The airborne chemical can even travel significant distances, damaging plants downwind, and contaminating homes. This problem is poised to get worse -- Dow Agrosiences has asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to approve genetically modified corn that would allow farmers to spray the entire crop with large amounts of 2,4-D (without harming the corn); some experts estimate that this will increase 2,4-D use by 50 fold, and farmers of other crops are very worried that this overuse will harm their crops and their families.

For all of these reasons, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2008 to cancel registrations for 2,4-D. Nearly four years have passed, and the EPA still hasn't responded, so the NRDC filed a lawsuit against the agency for its delay on this important issue yesterday. We will also be turning to our supporters in the coming weeks for ongoing help in this fight.

Meanwhile, here are some things you can do to protect yourself and your family:

- Avoid using any weed control products that contain 2,4-D, including weed and feed products with this chemical. Check the labels, and look for words like "2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid," or "diethanolamine salt of 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid."
- Keep your carpets uncontaminated by having a shoes off policy in your home, and vacuuming the carpets at least weekly with a HEPA vacuum cleaner. If you have a toddler, wash their hands frequently; if you have a dog, wipe their paws when they have been playing in an area that might have been treated with chemicals.
- Check with your child's school and with your town, to make sure 2,4-D isn't used on local athletic fields, playgrounds, and parks.

Learn more about 2,4-D on NRDC's website [here](#).