

Casillas

Pesticide Action Project

A Project of the Migrant Farm Worker Division of Colorado Legal Services and
Equal Justice Works

Pesticides poison Colorado farm workers

During 2001, a group of Colorado migrant farm worker children was exposed to pesticide drift. The children experienced symptoms of severe organophosphate poisoning, requiring hospitalization. A man working in a Colorado field breathed too large a dose of insecticides. He was admitted to the emergency room with a heart rate of thirty-four.

A group of field workers attempted to avoid the poison from a crop duster that doused them with pesticides. The workers ran from the toxic spray, attempting to deflect it by spraying a water hose. Across Colorado, farm workers and their children experienced chronic skin rashes, irritated eyes and no training in pesticides.

Farm workers labor in pesticide-laden fields, hand picking fruits and vegetables. The Environmental Protection Agency says reported cases indicate that tens of thousands of farm workers are poisoned by pesticides every year. Because most cases are not diagnosed or reported, the actual number of poisonings is much higher.

Short-term symptoms of pesticide exposure often mimic the cold or flu. Pesticides also cause serious long-term harm such as cancer, sterility, birth defects and miscarriages. These

results might not appear until years after the exposure. Children are especially vulnerable.

Employers must obey laws

Federal laws require employers who use pesticides to take safety precautions. Employers must provide water in the field, so that workers can wash pesticides from their skin. An employer must promptly take an injured worker to a doctor, and provide information about the pesticide to the health care professional and to the worker. It is illegal to spray people with pesticides or expose them to drift, to fail to warn workers to get out of a field, to send workers into a treated field before it is safe, or to allow young children to work in a treated field.

Enforcement protects workers' health

Until 2001, Colorado farm workers made few complaints about pesticide violations. But during

You can help

- Be alert for pesticide exposures. Common symptoms include skin irritation, eye irritation, blurred vision, pinpoint pupils, difficulty breathing, nausea and dizziness. There are many other symptoms.
- If a worker has been exposed, encourage him to go to a doctor immediately. Ask the doctor to do the proper tests so the worker can prove that he was exposed. The tests must be done right away, often within 24 hours.
- Encourage the worker to contact Colorado Legal Services. Ask for Kimi Jackson at (970) 353-7554 or (970) 302-1922 (cell) or call our Denver office at 1-800-864-4330. Our staff is bilingual and services are free.
- Preserve evidence. Save contaminated clothing in a plastic bag.
- Report the misuse of pesticides to the Environmental Protection Agency office in Denver (1-800-227-8917).

the 2001 harvest season, pesticide enforcement improved dramatically in Colorado. Assisted by worker complaints and by the Casillas Pesticide Action Project, the Environmental Protection Agency conducted twenty-one field inspections in Colorado during 2001. The agency found that 20 of the 21 inspected growers were in violation of pesticide laws. In total, the EPA found 105 violations. Inspections leading to compliance with pesticide laws created safer working conditions for 808 farm workers in Colorado. The EPA will continue to inspect Colorado fields during 2002 and future years.

Your role in protecting workers' safety

You can improve farm workers' safety and working conditions by requesting an EPA inspection when you encounter pesticide violations. Your call to the EPA at 1-800-227-8917 can prevent a farm worker from developing cancer in future years or giving birth to a baby with birth defects.

You can also help by paying attention to the use of pesticides in your community and to their effect on farm workers. If you know a farm worker or a child of a farm worker who has experienced symptoms consistent with pesticide

In memory of José Casillas

CPAP was inspired by the tragic death of a 17-year-old farm worker named José Casillas. José was sprayed with pesticides twice during one week. Thinking he had merely been sprayed with water, he continued to wear his contaminated clothing, even sleeping in it. When he suffered from a severe headache, he went to a clinic, but he was not tested or treated for pesticide poisoning. He died shortly afterwards.

José's employer did little to avoid putting the workers at risk for pesticide poisoning. The workers weren't trained. There were no warning signs, no posting of the chemicals used, no water for decontamination, and no protection against drift.

exposure, talk with that person about pesticides and appropriate safety measures. Encourage the farm worker to see a doctor and to alert the doctor to any contact with pesticides. Refer the farm worker to the Casillas Pesticide Action Project for more information. The number is below.

Remember that pesticide exposure often goes unnoticed, because the symptoms are often vague. Many workers are not aware of the long-term health effects of chronic exposure to pesticides. You can help raise awareness about pesticides and safety.

CLS targets pesticide violations

Colorado Legal Services (CLS) provides free legal services for farm workers in all parts of Colorado. The Casillas Pesticide Action Project (CPAP) offers training on health and safety issues related to pesticides, education about workers' rights, and free legal representation for workers whose rights have been violated.

CPAP also offers specialized training for health care professionals. CPAP's work discourages employers from misusing pesticides, and helps compensate injured workers. All services are free and bilingual.

**Contact: Kimi Jackson, Attorney
Colorado Legal Services, Migrant Div.
800 Eighth Ave., Ste. 202
Greeley, CO 80631
(970) 353-7554/tele; (970) 353-7557/fax
kjackson@colegalserv.org**

Safety precautions for farm workers

- Wash your hands before eating or smoking.
- Don't eat, smoke, sleep or let children play near pesticides.
- Bathe and change clothes immediately after work.
- Keep work clothes away from children. Wash work clothes separately.
- If you apply pesticides, ask your employer for protective clothing. Don't reuse pesticide containers.
- You have the right to refuse to enter a field that has recently been sprayed with pesticides.

In case of an exposure

- Remove your clothes. Wash with lots of water. Immediately see a doctor. Tell the doctor what happened.
- Try to get the name of the pesticide.
- Notify your employer in writing. Also notify Colorado Legal Services, (800) 864-4330, and the Environmental Protection Agency, 1-800-227-8917.
- Remember: Get Away from the pesticides (Alejarse), Bathe (Bañarse), Change Clothes (Cambiar), see a Doctor (Doctor).

