

# Pesticide Poisoning in a Normal Day

## Victims tell experiences to stop practices that poison

Exposure to pesticides can happen almost anywhere. Many times people are exposed to pesticides during the most routine and seemingly harmless activities, such as playing in the park or picking up the kids from school. Pesticide poisoning is not only a risk for people who apply pesticides. The prevalent and poorly regulated use of pesticides in our society means that everyone is at risk. Beyond Pesticides urges those who are involuntarily exposed and/or poisoned by pesticides to report these incidents to state authorities, EPA, elected officials, and the local media. (See below for more information.) Beyond Pesticides works with people at the community level to stop the poisoning and promote safe solutions.

### Taking a walk in Dallas, Texas

A pesticide poisoning incident occurred on a warm July, 2005 summer morning in Dallas, Texas when Cynthia Brast was taking a walk with her daughter in their neighborhood and they were involuntarily exposed to lawn chemicals. Without warning, they were sprayed with a sticky wet substance that rained down on them. The spray covered their skin and got into their eyes, nose and mouth. Immediately their skin began to sting and they noticed a bad taste in their mouths. Ms. Brast went to investigate where the spray had come from and what it was.

Across the street Ms. Brast saw a TruGreen ChemLawn truck. Upon further inspection she noticed an applicator for the company spraying something over a house and into the trees. The spray extended all the way across the street to the sidewalk where she and her daughter had been standing.

Immediately, Ms. Brast called the police. She told them an unknown chemical had been sprayed on her and her daughter, and they sent a fire/EMS unit over to them immediately. They were taken to the hospital where the doctors informed them that not much could be done due to the fact that the chemical to which they were exposed was unknown. The doctors then advised that Ms. Brast and her daughter shower and wash off the chemicals as best they could and then contact TruGreen ChemLawn to find out what the chemical was.

Ms. Brast and her daughter followed the doctor's instructions. They took special care to save their clothes in a plastic



Cynthia Brast and her daughter in Jackson, WY.

bag in case they were needed as samples for later testing. After cleaning themselves off, they contacted TruGreen ChemLawn. Ms. Brast was told that the pesticide products were Orthene and Banner Maxx, along with an unnamed oil.

Upon finding out what she had been sprayed with, Ms. Brast contacted her physician and shared the information.

Her physician spoke with poison control and after administering blood tests and various other medical examinations, told Ms. Brast that she was wheezing and gave her new asthma medication. Ms. Brast was instructed to use her inhaler if she continued to experience trouble breathing. Ms. Brast's daughter complained of a headache and soar throat after the exposure. Ms. Brast also experienced these symptoms, as well as difficulty breathing and an upset stomach.

The symptoms that Ms. Brast and her daughter exhibited are not surprising considering the pesticides they were exposed to. The active ingredient in Orthene is acephate. Exposure to acephate can cause convulsions, dizziness, sweating, labored breathing, nausea, pupillary constriction, muscle cramps, and excessive salivation. Acephate is a cholinesterase inhibitor as well as a possible carcinogen.

The other pesticide Ms. Brast was exposed to, Banner Maxx, is just as dangerous. The Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) states, under symptoms of acute exposure, that it "may be irritating to eyes and respiratory tract. Exposure to high va-

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Elaine Smith of West Townshead, VT.

por levels may cause headache, dizziness, numbness, nausea, incoordination, or other central nervous system effects.” The active ingredient in Banner Maxx is identified as propiconazole. Propiconazole is a reproductive and developmental toxin and a possible carcinogen.

When Ms. Brast contacted Tru-Green ChemLawn and notified them of the incident the company’s insurance paid for some related doctor bills and new clothes to replace the ones saturated with pesticides. While many

of the immediate symptoms have gone away, Ms. Brast is now experiencing joint pains, particularly in the knees.

## Grocery shopping in West Townshead, Vermont

Elaine Smith of West Townshead, Vermont became an unwilling victim of pesticide poisoning in July 2005 when she went to her local supermarket to buy groceries. While she was waiting in line to pay she began to feel dizzy and her eyes, throat, nose, mouth, tongue, upper lip, and lungs began to burn. She also began to experience pain in the right side of her nose and across her right cheek.

Immediately after Ms. Smith began to experience pain, she saw a man cross in front of the open front doors of the supermarket. The man was spraying a liquid from a long hose along the side of the building. Ms. Smith asked the woman behind the checkout counter what the man outside was spraying, and the woman replied that he was spraying for bugs. When Ms. Smith told the woman she health reactions from pesticides, the woman assured her that it was safe and would not hurt her and that it was legal in Vermont.

Ms. Smith left the supermarket as quickly as possible and got into her truck to drive home. She continued to react to the pesticides once inside her truck, since her truck had been parked only a few feet from where the pesticides were being sprayed. As she drove home, Ms. Smith’s symptoms began to worsen. The burning and pain she had been feeling in the store had amplified, and she began to feel nauseous. At this point

she also began to have difficulty concentrating and became very short of breath.

When Ms. Smith arrived home she realized that, not only did her eyes burn very badly, but they had also become extremely bloodshot. She began to develop a very painful migraine headache and could smell the pesticides on her skin. Ms. Smith wanted to go to her doctor and have him examine her, however she was unable to get to his office due to the overwhelming presence of the pesticides in her car. She immediately called her doctor and after speaking with his nurse, it was agreed that she should take extra doses of her usual asthma medicine.

Over the next several days, some of her symptoms began to disappear, however some got worse. Ms. Smith’s left eye became more red and painful, and she was finally forced to go to the emergency room because of all of the pain it was causing her. The doctor at the emergency room told Ms. Smith that she had a hemorrhage in her eye, and it would resolve itself over time.

Ms. Smith was able to find out the name of the pesticide she was exposed to, as well as the active and inert ingredients. The pesticide used at the supermarket was Demand CS, manufactured by the Syngenta Corporation. The active ingredient in Demand CS is the synthetic pyrethroid Lambda-cyhalothrin. The MSDS for Demand CS lists various symptoms of exposure that are the same as those Ms. Smith experienced, including eye and skin irritation, tingling, numbness and burning of skin, headache, and nausea.

Three weeks after the poisoning, Ms. Smith continued to feel ill. In particular, her asthma became much worse than it had been before the time of exposure, and the hemorrhage in her eye was not completely healed. Currently, she has found that she is much more chemically sensitized than she was before, and she reacts severely to such things as exhaust fumes and chemicals used for printing on paper.

**Editors note.** *Pesticide poisoning and contamination stories like those described above must be told and documented. We urge poisoning victims to complete a Pesticide Incident Report that can be printed off our website at [www.beyondpesticides.org/emergencies/pir\\_form.pdf](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/emergencies/pir_form.pdf), or mailed to you upon request. The incident should also be reported to the state pesticide law enforcement agency (see our website, [www.beyondpesticides.org](http://www.beyondpesticides.org), to identify the appropriate contact in your state.) If you call to report the incident, request an investigation, and follow up with a written request and letter that documents the conversation and any agreements. Copy your letter to the EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson (Environmental Protection Agency, Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20460. Phone: 202-564-4700) and to your elected officials, U.S. Representatives ([www.house.gov/writerep](http://www.house.gov/writerep)) and U.S. Senators ([www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)). Reporting the incident to local media will help to identify others who have been poisoned, and inform the community of this public health and environmental threat. Ultimately, documentation and raised awareness will help curtail practices that are causing poisonings and contamination. For more assistance, contact Beyond Pesticides.*