
NPTN fact sheets are designed to answer questions that are commonly asked by the general public about pesticides that are regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). This document is intended to be educational in nature and helpful to consumers for making decisions about pesticide use.

National
Pesticide
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Network

Homeowners, Wildlife & Pesticides

Wildlife live in a variety of habitats, including parks, residences, agriculture, rangelands, lakes, forests, wetlands, and golf courses. They forage for food, seek shelter, and raise their young in these areas. Some of these areas are treated with pesticides. If wildlife are exposed to enough of a given pesticide (e.g., while living in or migrating through a recently treated area) it may cause adverse health effects for them. The routes of pesticide exposure are ingestion, inhalation, or absorption through the skin or eye. Wildlife may ingest a pesticide by eating treated crops or contaminated food items such as insects, contaminated water such as water droplets off treated plants, or while grooming. The pesticide may also affect the health of wildlife indirectly through habitat degradation, which may decrease the availability of certain plants or insects important in the diet of some animals or habitat requirements such as cover.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires pesticide manufacturers to perform many tests in order to have their products registered. The EPA-required tests determine whether a pesticide product has adverse effects on people, the environment, or non-target organisms (1). Wildlife, or any other organism that is not the target of a given product, is called a non-target organism. If the EPA determines that a pesticide product may be hazardous to wildlife, the product must have an Environmental Hazards statements on its label which guides the user in application or the EPA may restrict its use (1).

Prior to a pesticide application, homeowners should take the time to choose an appropriate pesticide product to control the pest. Once a suitable product is chosen, the directions for use located on the label must be read and followed thoroughly to ensure that the pesticide product is applied correctly. Choosing the correct pesticide product and carefully applying it can minimize potential exposures to non-target organisms. An example of a non-target organism is honey bees. Consequently, there is often a precautionary statement on pesticide labels about this insect.

Homeowners can also minimize pesticide exposure to non-target organisms by applying the minimum amount of pesticide the fewest number of times, but at a level which is still capable at controlling the pest. Incorporating Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which is an approach that centers on long term control of pests using physical, mechanical, cultural, biological, chemical, and educational methods to prevent and control pests, can also reduce the risk to non-target organisms. Sometimes methods exist for controlling a pest that don't involve the use of pesticides (e.g., snap traps for rat and mice).

Pesticide applications to agricultural areas can also be done in a manner aimed at minimizing exposure. Non-target contact with pesticides can be decreased in agricultural areas by decreasing the frequency of applications over an entire area (broadcast), using buffer zones (untreated areas), and avoiding drift.

Prior to any pesticide application, always read the label and follow the instructions every time it is used. Pay particular attention to statements on the label dealing with wildlife. If you apply a pesticide near wildlife habitats, try to avoid applications near sensitive areas like ponds, drainage ditches, and wetlands. Do not wash pesticide application equipment in these areas. Avoid applications to areas where animals might be living, nesting, or feeding.

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References

1. *Label Review Manual*; U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pesticide Programs, U. S. Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1998. <http://www.epa.gov/oppfead1/labeling/lrm/index.html>.