



# Department of Pesticide Regulation



Paul E. Helliker  
Director

## MEMORANDUM

Gray Davis  
Governor  
Winston H. Hickox  
Secretary, California  
Environmental  
Protection Agency

TO: Sue Edmiston  
Agriculture Program Supervisor III  
Worker Health & Safety Branch

**HSM-02015**

FROM: Kathy Orr [original signed by K. Orr]  
Associate Environmental Research Scientist  
445-4196

DATE: June 25, 2002

SUBJECT: PHYSICIAN FEEDBACK 2000

The purpose of the current project was to develop a feedback mechanism to physician's who have filed Pesticide Illness Reports (PIR) to the Pesticide Illness Surveillance Program (PISP). California physicians are required to report all cases of illness or injury that may have been a result of exposure to pesticides by telephone to the local health department. Section 105200 of the California Health and Safety Code requires physicians to report any patients whose condition they know or have reason to believe derived from exposure to pesticides. When this requirement is met, the health department informs the county agricultural commissioner and also completes a PIR, copies of which are distributed to the State Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), to the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) and Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR). Annual reporting of pesticide incidents by doctors via PIR accounted for 38 percent of the cases reported in 2000. However, between 1994 and 1999 the number of cases received as a PIR ranged from as 15 to 31 percent with an average of 24 percent of total illnesses investigated.

DPR has explored several different procedures in efforts to improve the completeness and timeliness of pesticide illness reporting in California. In 1994, DPR initiated an effort to enhance physician reporting and familiarity of the requirement. This objective was met by sending summaries of the reporting requirements for pesticide related conditions to all actively registered physicians within the state of California. Subsequently, throughout 1995 and 1996, DPR sent individual reminders when it was determined that physicians failed to report pesticide-related illnesses. These physicians were predominantly identified through Doctor's First Report of Occupational Illness and Injury.

Feedback from these efforts resulted in several proposed reasons for the failure of physician's to report. First, physicians do not understand what constitutes a pesticide, antimicrobials in particular. Second, the number of agencies to whom the reports are submitted is confusing. However, one of his biggest criticisms of the system was the lack of feedback to the reporting physician regarding the outcome of investigations. It was also suggested that the resulting data is underutilized, and that physicians are not provided with the percentage of actual pesticide illnesses relative to the number of physician reports received.



This project was developed in response to physicians who have expressed interest in learning the outcome of pesticide related illnesses that they have reported to the Department of Pesticide Regulation. Each filer was sent a summary letter (attachment I) describing our objective with a prepaid response card (attached) offering them the opportunity to accept or decline further information when the next year's data is released. The attached response card (attachment II) included the option of requesting a printed copy of our illness surveillance program description, an annual pesticide incident summary, statewide pesticide summary tabulations and county specific pesticide illness profiles.

The PISP database currently only captures the name of the physician and their affiliation. Therefore, other means of obtaining the address of the reporting medical providers were utilized. An internet site provided by the California Medical Board that enables searches for physicians or physician assistants proved to be useful. An array of online address directories was tapped as well. The results of these searches provided the street address, city and zip code for ease of mailing for all licensed physicians and professionals. The remaining addresses were located through search engines for the physician and the associated facility.

The letter sent acknowledged the fact the medical provider reported a pesticide-related illness or injury case(s) to the local health officer in accordance with the Health and Safety Code section 105200 during the year 2000. They were advised that the case was thoroughly investigated by the local county agricultural commissioner and the resulting data from the investigation was combined with the medical records and entered into our pesticide illness surveillance database. In addition, it was pointed out the data is used to identify pesticide-related illness trends and evaluate the effectiveness of our regulatory program.

A total of 481 cases were reported through the PIR in the year 2000. Two hundred sixty-nine individual physicians filed PIR's in the year 2000 and 190 of these filings were through the poison control centers in California. Two hundred sixty-nine letters were sent out and only 26 were returned to sender as undeliverable, indicative of a good success rate in obtaining the actual addresses. However, this effort was time consuming both in extracting the available information from the illness reports and obtaining the additional information. This process took about 6 -8 weeks for several hours per day and a lot of persistence.

Seventy-three postcard responses were received requesting data from 22 distinct counties. Data requests came from the northern, central and southern regions with 8, 19 and 8 requests respectively. Thirty-five physicians requested materials and a total of 50 requested to remain on the list. This represents an overall response rate of 30 percent and data requests for 14 percent excluding the 26 letters which were returned to sender as undeliverable.

The physicians or medical professionals that requested data were responsible for reporting a total of 109 cases.

Summary of Requests for County Specific Data

<b>County</b>	<b>Number of Requests</b>	<b><u>County</u></b>	<b>Number of Requests</b>
BUTTE	1	SAN BENITO	1
FRESNO	3	SAN DIEGO	1
IMPERIAL	1	SAN JOAQUIN	1
KERN	1	SAN LUIS OBISPO	1
LAKE	1	SANTA BARBARA	2
LOS ANGELES	1	SANTA CLARA	1
MADERA	2	SANTA CRUZ	2
MARIN	1	SONOMA	3
MERCED	2	STANISLAUS	2
MONTEREY	3	TULARE	2
SACRAMENTO	1	VENTURA	2

Seventy two percent of these cases reported by physicians who responded to the mailing took place in an agricultural setting compared to 24 percent in a non-agricultural setting. The remaining 4 percent of cases were not classified as either agricultural or non-agricultural because they were using product other than a pesticide such as a head lice product or a caustic cleaner or it was determined during the investigation that no pesticide application had taken place. Eighty seven percent of the cases were occupational in nature, with the balance (13 percent) being a non-occupational exposure. Several of the respondents had reported cases identified as part of a group exposure or priority episode. Two of the incidents involved drift from a nearby aerial application. Two episodes took place within a packinghouse. One of these incidents involved applying the wrong product. The other incident resulted from a surge of chlorine gas when power returned after an outage. The remaining incidents involved fieldworker exposure to residue where one was a priority and a reentry violation had taken place. Two other episodes involved suicide attempts, one of which was successful.

This process will be replicated for the 2001 data. Reporting physicians shall be offered follow-up information regarding cases they have reported through the system.

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Attachment I

<MONTH> <DAY> <YEAR>

<Salutation><FNAME><LNAME>  
<HOSPITAL\_CLINIC>  
<Address1>  
<CITY>, <STATE>, <ZIP>

Dear <Salutation> <LNAME>:

In 2000, you reported a pesticide-related illness or injury case(s) to the local health officer in accordance with the Health and Safety Code section 105299. Each case you reported was thoroughly investigated by the local county agricultural commissioner. The data from the investigation and medical records was entered into our illness surveillance database. This data is used to identify pesticide-related illness trends and evaluate the effectiveness of our pesticide regulatory program.

The annual summary report of cases reported during 2000 is now available. It can be viewed and down loaded from the web site at <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/whs/pdf/hs1831.pdf>. Printed copies are available by request. The attached response card includes the option of requesting a printed copy.

We also offer you the option of receiving specialized reports, describing the distribution of pesticide incidents in you county by pesticides involved and exposure circumstances. If you have particular questions about the results or operations of the Pesticide Illness Surveillance Program, please feel free to contact me electronically at [korr@cdpr.ca.gov](mailto:korr@cdpr.ca.gov) or mail at

Pesticide Illness Surveillance Program  
Worker Health and Safety Branch  
Department of Pesticide Regulation  
California Environmental Protection Agency  
Post Office Box 4015  
Sacramento, California 95812-4015

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Please take a few moments to fill out the postage paid card included with this letter. We would like to hear from you. Thank you for helping us keep track of pesticide health effects in California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathy Orr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "O" at the end.

Kathy Orr  
Associate Environmental Research Scientist  
Worker Health and Safety Branch  
(916) 445-4196

Attachment II

«SAL» «FIRST» «LAST»  
«CLINIC»  
«ADD»  
«CTY», «STATE» «ZIP\_CODE»

I would like to continue to receive notifications of report availability

- NO: remove my name from your mailing list
- YES: keep my name and address on file as you have them
- YES: Correct my name and address to:

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Send printed information

- Program description
- Annual narrative summary
- Statewide summary tabulations
- Profile for \_\_\_\_\_ County