



From the Director

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Getting wiser about pesticide safety

Age brings wisdom, but not always knowledge about pesticide safety. With Older Americans Month upon us, what better time to look at this issue as it relates to maturing Californians?

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation data shows a quarter of all non-agricultural, non-occupational illnesses reported in the state between 2005 and 2014 involved those 55 years and up. It's important because many pesticides can have a greater impact on people with underlying health issues that affect the heart, lungs or immune system.

Most all of the reported incidents were the result of careless pesticide storage and not following label instructions.

In 2013, an El Dorado County man, 59, was hospitalized after exposure to fumes from an insecticidal fogger used to kill bedbugs. Rather than leave the house after setting it off, as the label instructs, he went to take a nap. He was treated at a hospital for breathing difficulties, exacerbated by his COPD.

Mixing bleach or bleach-containing cleaners with other common cleaners can have serious consequences due to the release of toxic gases, which can damage lungs and sinuses. Most product labels, including bleach labels, warn users to not mix with other chemicals.

In 2011, a Los Angeles County woman, 61, had scrubbed out her toilet with a cleaner and, thinking the bowl didn't look clean enough, added bleach. She accidentally inhaled the resulting fumes and was hospitalized for wheezing, shortness of breath and chest pain.

Ingestion was the second most-common cause of illness. This is usually the result of putting cleaners or pesticides in improper containers.

One case, in 2013, involved a Fresno County woman, 70, who brought home an herbicide (paraquat) in a tea bottle from work. Her son thought the bottle contained tea and put it in the refrigerator. A week later, his mother drank it and became ill. She died 14 days later.

Takeaways from such tragic accidents: Follow product labels carefully, never mix cleaners, and never store pesticides in containers other than their factory container.

Following these guidelines will make us all, regardless of age, wiser and safer.

Downloadable pesticide safety fact sheets:

<http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/dept/factshts/directory.htm#consumer>