

At the California Department of Pesticide Regulation ([DPR](#)), we see many scary things involving pesticide misuse all year round -- not just at Halloween.

DPR all too regularly receives reports of illnesses or even deaths. These reports, compiled by county agricultural commissioners (CACs) who work with the department on pesticide enforcement, help us in developing future safety guidelines.

In California, most pesticide related illnesses and injuries occur in homes or at non-farm workplaces, like restaurants. The main reasons: Storing pesticides in food or beverage containers, and failure to read the instructions on the products.

Below is a sample of some incidents from DPR' s crypts, AKA Pesticide Episode Investigation Reports. Hopefully, these will scare some sense into people and illuminate the dangers of improper handling.

#### **On a sour note...**



Storing pesticides near or in food containers is always a bad idea.

This was a bitter lesson learned by a woman in Southern California this year who reached for a glass of lemonade in the morning and got something else instead.

The woman later told an investigator from the local county agricultural commissioner's office that while staying at a friend's house, she pulled a one-gallon jug of what she believed to be lemonade from the refrigerator that actually contained pool chlorine!

The container, she explained, was mistakenly placed in the fridge by her friend's husband, who apparently also believed it to be lemonade.

After taking a swig, she spit the chlorine out, but it was too late. Her tongue began to burn, and her throat and mouth were irritated.

Taken to a regional medical center, a doctor determined she suffered burns to her throat. She was hospitalized for three days.

The victim declined to provide the investigator with the name, contact information or address of the friend she stayed with.

“(She) stated that she accidentally took a sip from the ‘pool chlorine’ container, thinking it was lemonade, because the container so closely resembled that of a one gallon container of lemonade,” reads the CAC’s investigative report. “She stated that it would never happen again and would advise her friends against placing chemicals in proximity to food or beverage items.”

The investigator provided the victim with DPR’s pesticide-storage consumer fact sheet “[Buy less, lock it away, and dispose with care.](#)”

### **A lousy situation**

The most chilling stories DPR sees are those involving children. Like this one. Early this year, a toddler was admitted to the hospital after ingesting a chemical described as “lice powder.”



The victim’s mother told the local county agricultural commissioner’s staff that she found her son leaving her roommate’s bedroom, covered in a white powder. The victim’s family rented a room in the friend’s house.

“The friend told the victim’s mother that she had a Ziploc bag containing lice powder, on top of her medicine cabinet, but out of reach of children,” the report says. It notes that the unlabeled product was purchased in Guatemala, and is illegal to use in California.

The toddler was washed and changed into new clothes. However, shortly after eating, he laid down and began to exhibit symptoms of illness. As his parents drove him to the hospital, he was shuddering, vomiting, and having difficulty breathing.

Luckily, the boy recovered and was released the next day.

Not so happily, the residents were cited for improperly storing a pesticide. No further enforcement actions were taken, as the mother refused to provide the investigator with her address. Children can get into all kinds of places. Pesticides and kids are a scary mix... so beware of these types of exposure possibilities.

## Bleach and ammonia: A dangerous cocktail



One afternoon, a teen mopping floors in the bar area of a restaurant was sickened by toxic fumes after mixing bleach with ammonia.

According to an investigation by the local county agricultural commissioner's office, the youth, 17, suffered a reaction to the resulting noxious gas (called chloramine). Symptoms included shortness of breath and chest pain.

He told the investigator he was instructed to use the bleach-ammonia mixture to clean the bar area.

He notified his manager after he became ill and was picked up by his father. His dad took him to the emergency room, where he remained for 24 hours.

An inspector later spoke to the manager and explained that the product label clearly states that bleach and ammonia products should not be mixed, and that mixing these products had caused an employee to become ill. The bleach product label also requires users to wear rubber gloves and eyewear, which were not provided by the employer for employees to use, the CAC investigation found. The CAC cited the employer for a violation of the Food and Agricultural Code.

The agricultural commissioner's office provided the restaurant owner with DPR's Pesticide Safety Information Series "N-8" booklet (["Pesticide Safety Rules for Pesticide Handlers in Non-Agricultural Settings"](#)) and the DPR handout "[Using Disinfectants, Sanitizers, Medical Sterilants, and Other Antimicrobials in the Workplace.](#)"

The incident was referred to Cal/OSHA, at the state Department of Industrial Relations

## Rats!



Here's a freaky story about a rat – but the rodent wasn't the scariest part.

It was about 9 p.m. – just before Halloween last year -- when a 59-year-old woman spotted a rat in her home. She grabbed a can of flea-and-bed bug fogger with the intention of killing the rodent.

However, as she pulled her arm back, she accidentally triggered some spray from the can, which she accidentally inhaled.

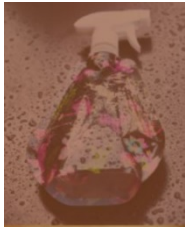
She went to a local medical center, where staff noted she experienced coughing, vomiting and dry heaving.

The woman told the local county agricultural commissioner's office investigator, during a subsequent interview, that her embarrassment exceeded her health concerns.

Moral: Use the right pesticide for the right pest. Misusing pesticides is no laughing matter.

### **Pesticides Blast Injures Neighbor!**

One February morning, a man was injured when a spray bottle being used by his neighbor's gardener suddenly exploded – sending plastic fragments flying into his hand.



The gardener, it turned out, was instructed by his customer to use pool chlorine to kill weeds in her yard. He mixed the powder with water in a 5-gallon pump sprayer....and then added a spoonful of herbicide.

The chlorine label noted it should not be mixed with acidic products, such as the herbicide he'd mixed in. An investigator from the local county agricultural commissioner's office surmised gas had built up in the plastic bottle, causing it to explode.

The neighbor was hit by plastic debris and suffered a broken finger. He was also splashed with the chemical concoction. The man was driven to an urgent care facility for examination and treatment.

In a later interview, the homeowner admitted she'd bought the chlorine for use on her weeds.

The investigator determined there had been a violation of the Food and Agricultural Code.

Moral of this story... love thy neighbor! Pool chlorine is for pools. Use pesticides consistent with the label: the way they are intended, for what they are intended. Do not make your own home brew.

These pesticide horror stories may be shocking...but the main takeaway is always follow product labels, including warnings about mixing, storing and use. Don't let misuse of pesticides haunt you or your loved ones.



- Downloadable pesticide safety fact sheets:  
<http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/dept/factshts/directory.htm#consumer>