



# TEXAS

## Pesticide Information Network

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Consumers Union SWRO, Texas Clean Water Fund, Texas Center for Policy Studies

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# NEWS

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## **What lies beneath: Study shows one-third of pesticides used in Texas local parks are moderately or highly toxic**

### *New Web site will allow Texans to search for toxicity of locally-used pesticides*

AUSTIN, Texas —City parks departments used at least 75,000 pounds of pesticides in Texas public parks in 1998, almost one-third of which classify as moderately or highly toxic under Environmental Protection Agency standards, a study released today by the Texas Pesticide Information Network shows.

The Texas Pesticide Information Network, an Austin-based nonprofit organization, surveyed the 25 largest metropolitan areas in Texas to determine the magnitude, frequency and potential health risks of toxic chemical use in parks. The results are analyzed in a report, *Play at Your Own Risk: the Hidden Dangers of Pesticide Use in Texas' City Parks*, and accompanying Web site, <http://www.txpin.org/parks>.

Of the cities surveyed, **Midland** ranked first both in pesticide use per acre and percentage of toxic pesticide applications, with 74 percent of its pesticides bearing the EPA's DANGER label (second only to the agency's POISON/DANGER distinction.) **Odessa** and **Brownsville** ranked next in toxicity, while **Garland**, **Wichita Falls**, **Irving** and **Tyler** followed Midland in pesticide use per acre.

Cities with the lowest pesticide use indices included **Corpus Christi**, **El Paso**, **College Station**, **San Antonio** and **Lubbock**.

“Contrary to popular conception, pesticides are not safe, particularly for children,” said Reggie James, director of CU’s Southwest Regional Office. “When even seemingly benign pest-killers are linked to cancer, it’s time to examine the potential dangers we’re exposed to every day in the name of pretty grass and ant-free picnics.”

The 25 metropolitan areas surveyed include a combined population of 8.8 million people and 2,922 city parks occupying more than 76,000 acres. In addition to the 75,000 pounds of pesticides applied, the cities reported using at least 100,000 pounds of “weed-and-feed” fertilizers often laced with pesticides.

While communities in other states, including California and New York, have begun to phase out toxic pesticide practices, a law passed in Texas in 1993 actually prohibits cities from regulating pesticide sales and use. Texas also lags behind states that require city parks departments to report their pesticide practices.

“Since Texas does not require cities to report even basic details about pesticide use, as some states now do, it is difficult to make a comprehensive assessment of the potential effects of pesticide use in city parks,” said Mary Kelly, director of the Texas Center for Policy Studies. “Furthermore, without a reporting requirement, there is little public oversight or accountability for pesticide use in parks and incentives for using healthier alternatives to pesticides may be reduced.”

The golf courses surveyed in the study used four times more pesticides per acre than other types of parks on average. They also tended to use more toxic pesticides.

Herbicide use accounted for a whopping 75 percent of the cities’ total pesticide applications, while insecticides represented 19 percent of applications. Particularly troubling is the widespread use of the herbicide glyphosphate, sold in stores as Roundup, Rodeo and Kleen-Up, which has been linked to non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma in animals.

Twelve cities out of 26 said they used the insecticide Dursban and similar insecticides containing the active ingredient chlorpyrifos — banned by the EPA in June 2000 because of its potential adverse effects on children’s nervous system and brain development. Dursban accounted for more than one-quarter of overall insecticide applications in parks.

The EPA ruling allows Dursban to remain on retail shelves through December 2001. Professional applicators may continue using existing stock of Dursban after its sale is banned.

“This study has two broad implications,” James of Consumers Union said. “One, it’s time for Texas to institute a reporting requirement to better track pesticide use. Two, the state Legislature should give communities back the power to regulate pesticides and explore healthier alternatives. Why does it make sense to deprive a municipality of the right to control pesticide use within its jurisdiction, when safer parks demand it?”

Key policy recommendations in the CU report include:

- Keep local pesticide use information in a central location, preferably computerized in a format easily accessible to the public, government officials and pest control professionals.
- Require cities over a certain size to report annual pesticide use information to the Texas Structural Pest Control Board for analysis and examination.

- Repeal the state law that prohibits any city, county or other local body from regulating its own pesticide use.
- Post visible, informative and easy-to-understand notice before and after pesticide application in public parks.
- Require that local governments adopt an “integrated pest management” policy in public parks that reduces pesticide use wherever possible and uses the least toxic treatments available when pesticide use is unavoidable. Texas’ public school districts have already implemented IPM policies.

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