



# Oregon Updater



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## Making a Difference

### OTA Moves Pesticide Reform through the Legislature

*“The spray totally burned me – I was on fire, my head, my legs, my arms – I was in pain. I tied a hankie over my face and tried to find my animals and get fresh air. I hit a wall of chemical – the spray was so thick you could cut it with a knife.”*

-a resident of Western Lane County

OTA is challenging the unnecessary practice of herbicide sprays on forest and farmland and we are partnering with many Oregonians whose health and property are directly impacted.

Western Oregon is lush with fir and pine forests and it is said that the



Coast Range is the most heavily logged ecosystem in the world. For each clear cut, timber companies launch a multi-year pesticide spray operation that delivers chemicals by planes and helicopters. Many of these chemicals are suspected neurotoxicants, carcinogens and endocrine disruptors.

Oregon’s rural communities are drowning in massive amounts of herbicide spray. Compared to other states, Oregon lacks laws to protect public health or the environment from pesticide drift that is a result of large-scale aerial spray operations. OTA’s research shows that pesticide sprays are routinely dropped on land next to public schools. There is nothing to prevent a toxic soup of chemicals from drifting onto school grounds. This has in fact happened at schools in Jefferson, Hood River, and Yamhill counties.

Newly published research studies are providing more definitive answers about certain risks of cancer, autism, and multiple chemical sensitivities from pesticide exposures.

OTA is initiating gutsy strategies to confront root causes of toxic pollution in this state. Our effective combination of educating elected representatives and organizing in rural communities led to the creation of the *Senate Work Group on Pesticides and Children’s Health*. This is a momentous step – the first of its kind in Oregon – leading to high level discussions amongst lawmakers on creating an action plan to reduce pesticides exposures for Oregon children.

OTA has been asked to play a key role on the *Work Group* by providing leadership and setting its scope and work plan. The *Work Group* will make a report to the 2008 Legislature and propose pesticide reform legislation in 2009.

OTA and our national partner, Pesticide Action Network of North America, are setting up drift catchers, a simple type of

Please turn to **Pesticide Reform** →

## Clean Air for Climate and Kids Project Reducing Benzene Emissions in Lane County

Thanks to the Lane County Board of Commissioners and 4-J school district, residents of Lane County can breathe a bit easier. The County Government and 4J school district recently adopted OTA recommended policies to reduce emissions of benzene, a known carcinogen.

This is particularly important since benzene levels in the Eugene-Springfield area are at 10 times higher than the level the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality deems acceptable.

The principal sources of benzene emissions are automobile exhaust and the transfer of gasoline at fueling stations and fuel depots. Did you know that spilling one ounce of gasoline from topping off a gas tank produces the same amount of volatile emissions as driving a car 56 miles? Or that a single vehicle dropping off and picking up kids at school puts three pounds of pollution into the air every month?

The County and 4J resolutions will limit unnecessary idling of county vehicles; promote the

creation of voluntary “no idle” zones around parks, schools, and public places; discourage “topping off” of county vehicles when refueling; and encourage citizens to do the same.

Local businesses are also being encouraged to sign-on. Sequential Biofuels, Oregon Roads, Inc., Sandpiper Import Service and Jackson’s Auto Care are among the first.

Oregon Toxics Alliance encourages residents and businesses to follow the County and School Board’s lead and take a few easy steps to reduce benzene emissions:

- Avoid “topping off” at the gas pump.
- Avoid idling at home, schools, parks and other drop-off areas. Anything over 20 seconds costs more than turning off your engine.
- Inform your friends of the hazards associated with benzene emissions by sharing these facts with them, and tell them how they can cut their emissions.

### Benzene Facts

- The US EPA classifies benzene as a Class A carcinogen and has concluded that Oregon’s cancer risk “is dominated by the emissions of benzene.”
- Gasoline sold in the Northwest is allowed to contain twice as much benzene as gas sold elsewhere in the country.
- Benzene levels in Eugene are 10 times the benchmark level believed to cause cancer in humans over a lifetime of exposure.

## Field Burning A First Hand Perspective

With a background in nursing and exercise physiology, I work as a therapist in cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation at Sacred Heart Medical Center. We try to improve the quality of life for people with heart and or lung disease through an extensive exercise and education program.

During field burning, I see first hand how several of our patients with lung disease (emphysema, asthma, etc.) are affected by the smoke intrusion. They often miss their therapy sessions because they do not want to chance going outdoors, and those who make it to their rehab appointments are often more short of breath than usual, requiring more oxy-

gen and medication. One of our patients uses up to seven different inhalers when she has difficulty breathing.

Steroids are often used as rescue medicine in an acute stage or flare-up of various respiratory diseases. Unfortunately, steroid use comes with a very high price. There are many harmful side effects including elevated blood pressure, elevated blood glucose, weight gain, cataracts, stomach ulcers, muscle wasting, accelerating atherosclerosis (blockage in arteries), and increasing risk of infections. One of our patients told me she was recently diagnosed with osteoporosis – which leads to broken bones – because steroids pull calcium from the bones, causing them to become brittle. Now this 50 year old woman has bones of a 90 year old woman.

Some of our patients develop bronchitis, and are susceptible to lung infections which lands them at their doctors' office, and a few have had to be hospitalized after smoke exposure due to field burning.

Many people, including health care workers, do not realize the potential detrimental effects that agricultural burning can cause. An increase in very small particulate matter (called PM 2.5) in the atmosphere, which occurs with field



burning, is associated with an 11% increase in the number of strokes. These PM 2.5 particles are too small for our respiratory system to filter out- so they get into our lungs, potentially causing problems.

Children under 18 years of age are particularly susceptible because their lungs are still developing. Exposure to PM 2.5 has been associated with aggravation of asthma, chronic bronchitis, and emphysema, and has been implicated in heart attack and premature death in people with cardiovascular disease. There are over 2000 peer-reviewed medical studies looking at the detrimental health effects from exposure to field burning smoke.

I am asking that you join in and support an end to this dangerous and archaic practice of field burning, for the health of all Willamette Valley residents.

By Carla Hervert, RN, MS ◆◆

### Foundation Support 2006-2007

- Ben & Jerry's Foundation
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- Evergreen Hill Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation
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- Resist, Inc.
- Rose E. Tucker Trust
- Sperling Foundation
- Spirit Mountain Community Fund

## Pesticide Reform (continued)...

air toxics monitor, in forest areas to measure chemical drift.

OTA plans to introduce key chemical policy reforms in local, regional, and state forums. Please join with us to plan and participate in this groundbreaking work to protect our health and our communities. We need to hear your stories and we'll need your testi-

mony at public hearings coming up in the next few months. We need your volunteer time to help us do the research. We need YOU to help us change Oregon's pesticide laws.

By Lisa Arkin, Executive Director ◆◆

## OTA Welcomes Newcomers

Oregon Toxics Alliance would like to welcome the newest addition to our staff: John Herberg. John has been actively involved in environmental and social issues since 1997. "I think there's a lot of room for improvement when it comes to how we interact with the environment and each other," John says, "That's why I like working at OTA."

John's official title is Administrative Assistant, but his responsibilities go beyond that. His degree in Computer Science makes him a natural as OTA's technology specialist and communications manager.

Volunteers play a big part at Oregon Toxics Alliance too. OTA would like to thank all the volunteers that tabled with us

at the Eugene Celebration. A special thanks goes to our ongoing volunteers and interns Samantha Cirillo, JT Tarrantino, Cynthia Kokis, Xander Kahn, and John Elzey. Oregon Toxics Alliance is a grassroots organization. Without our volunteers, we couldn't continue with our mission of defending the environment and protecting human health.

OTA is currently looking for people to help organize our Field Burning Campaign, perform research for the Pesticide Working Group, expand the Clean Air for Climate and Kids Campaign, or just put in a few hours every month around our office. If this sounds like something for you, please call (541) 465-8860.

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