

EPA'S CORE WORK CHEMICALS AND PESTICIDES

CRITICAL HEALTH PROTECTIONS

With sound science at its core, EPA protects the American public from the dangers of toxic chemicals and pesticides, evaluates new and existing chemicals and their risks, and finds ways to prevent or reduce pollution before it gets into the environment. Congress gave EPA responsibility for these actions under various federal laws, among others:

- The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) of 1996 requires that all pesticides distributed or sold in the United States must be registered by EPA to ensure that, if used according to specifications, they will not cause unreasonable risks to people or the environment.
- The Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), passed in 1976 and updated in 2016, gives EPA the authority to require the testing, record keeping and reporting of many chemical substances. It specifically addresses the production, importation, use and disposal of several hazardous and commonly found substances – polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), asbestos, radon and lead-based paint.
- The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act of 2002 authorizes EPA to set maximum limits on the amount of pesticide left as residue on food. In determining “safe” levels, EPA considers the toxicity of the pesticide and its byproducts, collective exposure to that pesticide in food and from other sources, and special risks to infants and children.
- The Pollution Prevention Act of 1990 focuses on reducing pollution at its source through cost-effective changes in production, operations and the use of raw materials by industry. EPA manages a range of pollution prevention programs under this authority that have resulted in decreased pollution, increased water and energy efficiency, better conservation of natural resources and huge savings.

Chemical Safety – Chemicals affect almost every aspect of our lives and it's EPA's job to evaluate their safety. Some can be extremely dangerous to people's health, especially to children, if they are not monitored and used properly. Under TSCA, EPA regulates new and existing chemicals and helps states and tribes ensure compliance with federal requirements:

- **New Chemicals** – EPA evaluates chemicals that are new to the marketplace for their risks to people and the environment. The agency functions as a gatekeeper before a new chemical is introduced and can set conditions for or even ban its use.
- **Existing Chemicals** – EPA scientists also review the safety of existing chemicals in a three-step process. They first designate certain chemicals as high priorities for risk evaluations and then determine if those chemicals pose an unreasonable risk to people's health or the environment under conditions set for their use. The final step is the imposition of conditions to eliminate those risks.
- **Compliance Support** – EPA works with its federal, state and tribal partners to assure compliance with the regulations governing the importation, manufacturing, processing, distribution, use and disposal of chemical substances. The agency annually awards grants to state and tribal governments to help them support a range of compliance programs.

Pesticides – Pesticides are developed to kill pests, but they can also be very harmful to people. Exposure can cause neurological problems and aggravate asthma, allergies and other respiratory

illnesses. They have been linked to cancer, hormone disruption and fetal development and reproductive problems. Children, especially small children, are exposed to pesticides in food, liquids and the air and are particularly vulnerable to their effects. Farm workers, who are routinely exposed to pesticides in the fields, also face increased risks.

- **Pesticide Registration** – One of EPA’s most important roles is the registration of pesticide products to ensure they will not harm people if instructions on their labels are followed. Sadly, unregistered and illegal pesticide products marketed to kill mice and other household pests are sold on the street or in small neighborhood stores. Children can easily mistake colorful mothballs containing toxic chemicals for candy and an illegal insecticide chalk with labels in Chinese and English claims it is “safe to use.” EPA has taken legal action against stores that endanger customers by selling illegal pesticides and has conducted extensive outreach in multiple languages to help people understand the risks they face.
- **Protecting Food** – Pesticides used in agriculture can linger in the food that is produced. Congress has told EPA to evaluate the safety of pesticides used on food and ensure that they meet strict standards that protect children. Using this authority, the agency has canceled or restricted the use of 270 pesticides for use on food or in homes because they posed particular threats to children and infants. Between 1995 and 2013, for example, children’s exposure to a group of insecticides that affect the nervous system fell by 70% after EPA canceled or restricted their use.
- **Scientific Research** – The advancement of our scientific understanding of pesticide risks is key to reducing the serious health effects of exposure. EPA funds research to better understand the effects of pesticides on people’s health and the environment and the risks of emerging technologies such as genetically modified crops and nanotechnology. Through its Endocrine Disruptors Program, the agency studies chemicals that can interfere with the body’s reproductive development systems and harm reproduction and fetal growth and development.

Pollution Prevention – It does not make sense to create pollution in the first place and clean it up after it endangers the American public when alternatives are possible. EPA works with an incredibly diverse group of industries to reduce, eliminate or prevent pollution at its source and has supported state efforts with pollution prevention grants. The results have been changes in production, operations, building practices and the use of raw materials that reduce energy use, divert materials from landfills, save companies money and are sustainable.