

HOT TOPICS

Industry says that 2,4-D report is based on shoddy research

CLEVELAND—A report in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* associating the herbicide 2,4-D with cancer in dogs is being criticized as inconclusive and poorly researched.

The September report concludes that dogs whose owners use herbicides containing 2,4-D are up to twice as likely to develop malignant lymphoma.

The 2,4-D Task Force, a group that conducts health and safety studies, says that "the weakness of the study's conclusions needs to be considered against the backdrop of numerous other studies which have found no convincing evidence of a link between 2,4-D and cancer."

Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Lawn Care Association (PLCAA), says 2,4-D is a worthwhile product:

"(2,4-D) is the most thoroughly tested

product of its kind on the market today. It has been the subject of toxicological, epidemiological and mutagenicity studies on three continents...which should be reassuring to those who have come to value 2,4-D for its cost and reliability."

Delaney says the questionnaire did not provide dog owners a list of chemicals from which to choose: "They had to rely on the memory of the person interviewed."

Dog owners were questioned 10 to 58 months after the animals were seen at veterinary hospitals. Also, some dogs that died from malignant lymphoma were never allowed access to yards and had



The health of dogs exposed to 2,4-D is the subject of a controversial report from the National Cancer Institute.

owners who never used 2,4-D or a lawn care service.

Howard M. Hayes, the study's principal author, and his co-authors did note that applications of 2,4-D by do-it-yourselfers are "more likely to reflect the actual 2,4-D exposure opportunity...than the number of lawn treatments by commercial lawn care companies."

James W. Gillett, director of Cornell University's Institute for Comparative and Environmental Toxicology, says the authors did not prove that 2,4-D is a carcinogen in dogs, or that lawn applications are related to any cancer in humans.

Dr. Wendell Mullison, one of the original developers of 2,4-D, says the evidence is circumstantial, and that epidemiologists usually do not consider any single study as proof of a cause and effect relationship.

Hayes and his co-authors admit that an absence of precise exposure data is "a major weakness" of the study, and say application frequency is the basis for their conclusions. The study was based on four 2,4-D applications per year. "The most it is applied," says Mullison, "is once in the spring and often again in the fall."

—Terry McIver

One vet's opinion

■ "I think there are some problems inherent in these types of epidemiological studies," says Dr. Robert Poppenga, DVM, of the American Board of Veterinary Toxicologists at Michigan State University.

Poppenga questions "the (homeowners') ability to recall details" regarding what chemicals were applied and when.

"I'm not certain that an

owner would have information with regard to what chemical the company may be actually applying. I'm not sure where they got that data."

In a 1990 article on pets and lawn chemicals, Poppenga wrote that "it is important to establish whether the amount of chemical the animal may have been exposed to is near a range known to be associated with adverse

health effects in the animal species."

"If used according to label directions and certain precautions are followed, nearly all commonly used lawn chemicals are safe around dogs and cats."

Today, Poppenga says that while the 2,4-D study, "may raise some legitimate concerns, it has to stand the test of time."

According to Poppenga, other studies need to be conducted before any blame is placed.

—T.M.

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