

Pesticides and You

News from the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP)

One in a Series of NCAMP "How-To's"

Getting Medical Help for Victims

•**What symptoms should a poisoning victim expect?** Symptoms vary widely depending upon the pesticide ingredients. Neurotoxic pesticides can cause: headache, nausea, dizziness, sweating, muscular aches or tremors, and other flu-like symptoms. Other common symptoms include diarrhea, breathing difficulties, excessive salivation, skin rashes, fatigue and moodiness.

•**What do you do if you think you have been poisoned?** Contact your doctor as soon as possible. Try and determine where and how you were exposed. Find the applicator and get the *common chemical name* and *trade name* of each pesticide applied. Ask the applicator for a product label and a material safety data sheet (MSDS) for each pesticide. These can be useful to

your doctor. You may also wish to contact NCAMP (701 E St., SE, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20003) for toxicity information on particular chemicals. Keep careful notes of your conversations and symptoms. Keep samples of contaminated clothing or foliage for laboratory analysis to prove that you were sprayed.

•**What if the applicator will not help you?** Most applicators are concerned about their liability and are willing to provide information. Always be pleasant, polite and firm. You have a right to ask and be answered. If you encounter an uncooperative individual, be creative -- try the person's superior or ask your physician or lawyer to contact the applicator. As a last resort, you can ask a judge for a court order requiring that the chemical's identity be revealed, but this is rarely necessary.

•**What do you say to the doctor?** Tell your doctor that you may have been poisoned, explaining what you were exposed to and how, and including your symptoms. Be calm, clear and precise. Give the doctor a copy of the label or MSDS, and point out the sections on medical attention. Many physicians are unfamiliar with pesticide poisoning, but will make good use of the information.

•**Are there any tests you should have done?** If you were exposed to an organophosphate or carbamate pesticide, you should be tested for blood cholinesterase inhibition.

•**What if your doctor won't look at the information?** Some physicians may be unwilling to consider poisoning -- be pleasant, but insist that they seriously assess the information. If they continue to refuse, you may wish to seek another doctor's assistance.