

Beyond Pesticides /

National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides

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HIGH CANCER RISK TIED TO WOOD UTILITY POLES TREATED WITH POISONIOUS CHEMICALS

*-- EPA report indicates North Carolina's soil is being threatened
by tons of poison from more than 2 million utility poles --*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Street by street, yard by yard, school by school, North Carolina's soil and water is being contaminated by the chemicals found in the wooden utility poles used across the state.

Now, a coalition of environmentalists, elected officials and policy makers are moving to replace the wooden poles with viable alternatives to ensure the safety of residents from harmful pollutants.

Approximately 2.3 million utility poles in the state have been treated for preservation purposes with toxic chemicals, including pentachlorophenol (penta), creosote and arsenic based pesticides. All of these chemicals have been linked to causing birth defects, cancer, genetic mutation, and impairment of the immune system, according to the EPA.

An Environmental Protection Agency report states that the penta within these utility poles can raise the risk of cancer among North Carolina residents. For example, children exposed to the soil around utility poles treated with penta face a risk of cancer 220 times higher than the EPA's acceptable level.

“After years of seeing our soil contaminated by the mega-hog farms in the state, we have found another toxic pollutant right in the front and back yards of our homes and schools,” said Jay Feldman, executive director of Beyond Pesticides / National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP). “Residents of North Carolina need to have these toxic utility poles replaced, and protect themselves from turning their homes into Superfund sites.

“What I can't understand is why the utility companies refuse to use alternative poles. Not only would it reduce the threat of cancer and other health problems, it would save them money. Wood poles have a 30 year life span while poles made from alternative materials, such as recycled steel, can stay in the ground for 80 years,” Feldman added.

Beyond Pesticides / NCAMP recently sent a survey to more than 3,000 utilities in the U.S. and Canada to learn more about the use, storage and disposal of wood poles.

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The American Wood Preservers Institute (AWAI) launched a campaign against the survey, urging utilities not to cooperate. However, Beyond Pesticides / NCAMP was able to obtain responses from utilities with distribution in 24 states and Canada, controlling nearly 1 million poles.

The survey shows that 69 percent of utility companies give away or sell to the public poles taken out of service.

“I think it is fair to say that we are shocked to learn how the utilities dispose of their old poles,” Feldman said. “The utility industry has been aware of the danger of these chemicals for decades. They refuse, however to use alternative poles – such as recycled steel, composites or concrete – that are safer, stronger and cheaper to use in the long run.”

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