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NEWS RELEASE

Healthy Schools Act Reveals Extent of Pesticide Use

Compliance With Act Inconsistent, Some School Districts Make Strides to Use Fewer Pesticides

[San Francisco, CA] One year after California Healthy Schools reporting requirements were put in place, a new report reveals that the state's 15 largest school districts—where over 26% of the state's public schoolchildren attend classes—anticipate using 54 very hazardous pesticide active ingredients, compared with 42 used just two years ago.

The report, *Learning Curve: Charting Progress on Pesticide Use and the Healthy Schools Act*, released today by California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG) Charitable Trust and Californians for Pesticide Reform (CPR), also shows that many of those target districts are not in full compliance with the law. However the report further finds that some have significantly improved their pest management practices.

The Healthy Schools Act, which went into effect January 2001, requires schools to track and report on their pesticide use, including sending parents a notification at the beginning of each school year listing every pesticide that schools in the district might use. *Learning Curve* finds that many of the largest school districts in the state use pesticides linked to childhood cancers, asthma and other serious health problems on the rise in California.

Before the Healthy Schools Act, school districts were not required to maintain any information on pesticide use in schools. At that time, the same districts later surveyed for *Learning Curve* revealed to CALPIRG Charitable Trust that they used 42 very hazardous pesticide active ingredients in 2000. Now, the Act's new reporting requirements provide official 2002 data—summarized in *Learning Curve*—for the total number of pesticides schools anticipate they might use, including 54 hazardous active ingredients. Comparing the figures, the new requirements clearly provide a more accurate picture of the extent of school pesticide use than was possible before the law.

“Because of the Healthy Schools Act, we now have a much better picture of pesticide use in California's schools,” said report author Corina McKendry, CALPIRG's Pesticide Associate. “Parents and school officials can now take informed action to protect children's health and say no to toxic pesticides at schools.”

Learning Curve also documents inconsistent implementation of the Healthy Schools Act across school districts. The report finds that four of the 15 school districts surveyed were out of compliance with the law's parental notification requirements as of January 2002.

In addition, while all districts informed the report author that they keep required records of pesticide use information, few could provide this information easily as mandated by the law. Also, although the Act requires school districts to give parents the option to be notified before each pesticide application in their children's schools, many districts made this process difficult, burying information on parent's right to register in small print at the bottom of long letters.

"Many districts are failing to live up to their end of the bargain by not making information easy to get and understand," David Chatfield, CPR Executive Director stated. "Denying parents the right to crucial information that can help them reduce their children's pesticide exposure is against the law and unacceptable."

Learning Curve finds that despite little improvement in pesticide management in some districts, others have successfully reduced their reliance on pesticides by using less toxic alternatives. Since the Act became law, Oakland Unified has joined San Francisco Unified and Los Angeles Unified in passing a strong Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy. IPM employs common sense, least toxic approaches to pest management, prioritizes children's health and often saves money in the long run.

"Alternatives to toxic pesticides work – we know this from experience in some of the state's largest school districts" said Martha Dina Arguello, Environmental Health Coordinator at Physicians for Social Responsibility, Los Angeles. "It's time for school officials to get serious, pass strong IPM policies and stop using pesticides around children."

In the report, CALPIRG CT and CPR call upon school districts to phase out the use of highly toxic pesticides, adopt and implement strong IPM policies, come into full compliance with the Healthy Schools Act and make information on district pesticide use easily accessible.

The organizations also call on parents and teachers to push their school districts to adopt strong IPM policies, participate in IPM oversight committees to ensure full policy implementation and ensure that they receive pesticide notifications from their districts. Finally, CALPIRG CT and CPR and urge state policy-makers to ban the use of highly toxic pesticides in California schools and other sites where children are likely to face exposure.

Learning Curve: Charting Progress on Pesticide Use and the Healthy Schools Act was released today by the Californians for Pesticide Reform coalition in news conferences throughout the state.

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To order a copy of "*Learning Curve: Charting Progress on Pesticide Use and The Healthy Schools Act*," call 888-CPR-4880 (outside California, 415-981-3939) or visit www.calhealthyschools.org or www.pesticidereform.org.