

# Consumer Alert: Illegal Pesticide Use

Pesticide Control Program  
NJ Department of  
Environmental Protection  
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Consumers should be aware of the illegal use of pesticides intended only for agricultural or commercial purposes by licensed pesticide applicators. **Illegal use poses a serious health threat to people and pets.**

According to the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a pattern of illegal misuse of the agricultural pesticide methyl parathion surfaced in 1994 with the serious contamination of homes and businesses in Lorain County, Ohio. Through the Superfund program EPA decontaminated 232 homes to habitable conditions at a cost of more than \$20 million. A similar incident in Jackson County, Mississippi involving methyl parathion was discovered which involved over 1400 homes being contaminated over a two-year period. Residents reported flu-like symptoms, diarrhea, headache, nausea and dizziness.

Methyl parathion is a highly toxic man-made pesticide that should only be used in open fields to control insects. It is commonly used on vegetable fields and orchards. This chemical is related to nerve gas. It is a brownish liquid that turns milky white when mixed with water. Methyl parathion smells like rotten eggs and can leave a yellow stain on areas where it has been sprayed.

Because methyl parathion breaks down slowly indoors, homes that have been sprayed with it pose a risk of serious health problems or death to humans and pets. Repeated exposure to even small amounts can cause persistent lack of appetite, weakness and malaise. Children, the elderly, and people with certain health problems are especially at risk.

In New Jersey, packets of Tempo™ insecticide, used to eliminate crawling and flying insects, have been sold by neighborhood street vendors without correct instructions for application. **It is illegal and unsafe to sell pesticide products without their proper labels.** The vendors were instructing the purchasers to open the packets and scatter the powder undiluted on the floor and "wherever they see roaches." Contact with the concentrated powder can be hazardous, especially to infants, children, the elderly, the sick, and pets. Overexposure to the concentrated powder may produce numbness and may impact the nervous system.

Illegal storage of pesticides can be as damaging as illegal use. An incident in New Jersey involved the sale of the insecticide diazinon stored in beer bottles. Two serious poisonings resulted from this practice along with an untold number of overexposures to this pesticide.

The EPA and the Pesticide Control Program (PCP) of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection are asking for your cooperation and vigilance in preventing further misuse of pesticides.

Follow these guidelines when considering pesticide applications:

- Do not hire people to apply pesticides in your home or business unless they are licensed with the PCP, and the business they work for is also licensed with the PCP.
- Do not allow someone to apply pesticides unless you have received detailed information about the pesticide(s).
- For personal home and garden use, do not purchase products with unknown ingredients, and do not purchase products without complete directions for use.
- When you do purchase a product, always remember to read the label. If you follow all label directions, you will reduce your risk of harming yourself and the environment.

**Please contact the following if you need more information:**

**NJDEP Pesticide Control Program**

General information: 609-984-6507

To report a pesticide misuse: 609-984-6568

Website: [www.pcpnj.org](http://www.pcpnj.org)

**National Pesticide Telecommunications Network**

For questions on possible health effects: 1-800-858-7378

**New Jersey Poison Information System**

For emergency situations involving pesticide exposure or poisoning:

1-800-222-1222