

The Mothball Mishap and Other Thoughtless Ways to Misuse Pesticides

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Reading and following pesticide label directions seems to be a reasonable thing. After all, the label tells how to use the product most effectively and safely. But, some people hear about ways to use products differently than what they are intended. Sometimes these misuses can pose real hazards to human health and the environment.

Misusing Mothballs

Shirley and Jack have a wildlife problem. They have mice in their garage, kitchen and basement. Their neighbor told them he heard that mothballs will drive mice away. Jack bought three containers of mothballs and spread them in the garage and basement. In the kitchen, he dropped moth balls under the kitchen sink and behind the refrigerator and stove, where he had seen mouse droppings.

The next day, their 10-year old daughter, Amanda, was coughing and wheezing. Her asthma was acting up.

Shirley wondered if Amanda's breathing problems were related to the mothballs. She looked at the label on the moth ball container and found mothballs should only be used in airtight containers, such as chests, trunks and garment bags. The label also gave the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) number

(1-800-858-7378) for emergency medical treatment information. She called the NPIC. The NPIC specialist told her mothballs are pesticides that come in a solid form, but, over time, volatilize—change slowly into a gas. Inhalation of mothballs can result in headache, nausea, vomiting and disorientation. She also learned people like her daughter Amanda, who have previous impaired respiratory function, may be more susceptible to the adverse effects of mothballs.

What a nightmare! The next step was to remove the mothballs. The mothball label directs users to avoid skin contact so Shirley and Jack wore gloves when removing them. After all the mothballs were collected, they opened doors and windows to ventilate the house. In the kitchen, they turned on the hood fan to increase air circulation and blow kitchen air outdoors.

Misunderstanding Boric Acid

Marla hates the ants, spiders and boxelder bugs that invade her home. A friend tells her boric acid is a safe way to kill insects so she thinks it would be smart to put a barrier of boric acid around the outside of her home to prevent bugs from coming inside.

At the hardware store, she finds boric acid costs about \$5 for a 12 oz. container, but knows she will need to buy a lot of boric acid to treat the whole perimeter. She decided to call

the extension office to find out where to buy boric acid in bulk.

From her local extension educator, Marla learns boric acid probably isn't going to be effective as an outdoor barrier treatment and will likely be a waste of time and money. The boric acid label says it can be applied indoors, behind appliances, in cupboard corners and in cracks and crevices. Powder visible after the application must be brushed into cracks and crevices and removed. The product label does not mention outdoor use.

How boric acid works. When cockroaches walk through a dusting of boric acid, it attaches to spines on their legs and body. Cockroaches ingest boric acid as they groom themselves. It is primarily a slow-acting stomach poison. Boric acid is not very effective against spiders or insects, like boxelder bugs, which do not groom themselves.

An outdoor barrier of boric acid would not be effective against spiders and boxelder bugs, which are two pests Marla wants to control. In addition, humidity and rain would quickly reduce the effectiveness of boric acid outdoors. Marla was encouraged to not use boric acid outdoors. She was told that sealing cracks and crevices to prevent insects from coming indoors would be time well spent.

Exploding Foggers

A family had a bad German cockroach infestation in their

The Truth about Hedge Apples

Hedge apples are the fruit of the Osage orange tree. The belief about the use of hedge apples as an insect repellent is widespread and persistent. It is claimed placing hedge apples around the foundation or inside the basement will repel or control insects.

The truth: Iowa State University toxicologists have chemically extracted compounds from hedge apples. When concentrated, these compounds have a repellent effect. But, these researchers found the normal concentration of these compounds in the hedge apple itself was too low to be an effective repellent. We don't recommend hedge apples as an insect repellent.

One homeowner reported she found the source of an Indian meal moth infestation in a bag of hedge apples she had in her basement to keep spiders away.



small two-bedroom house. They decided to use foggers to control their cockroach infestation because they are easy to buy and use. They bought 19 foggers from the hardware store and set them off all at the same time. Fortunately they left the house, because the water heater pilot light ignited the vapors and the resulting explosion blew the house off its foundation.

This explosion could have been prevented if only they would have read and followed the label directions. On the product label, it clearly says "PUT OUT ALL FLAMES AND PILOT LIGHTS." The labels also say to use one fogger unit to treat 6,000 cubic feet of space—equivalent to a 25' by

30' room. Nineteen foggers was many more than should have been used in a small home.

Take Home Messages

These are true stories and actual examples of what can happen when pesticides are used inappropriately and thoughtlessly.

Reading, understanding and following label directions helps determine where the product can be used, what pests will be controlled and how to use it correctly and safely. If the use you have in mind isn't given on the label, rethink the problem, make a phone call to the extension office and try a different approach.

Kids Are Back in School and So Are Head Lice

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You thought you had everything figured out: soccer schedules, music lessons, school supplies, lunches, new shoes and socks. But, did you plan for head lice?

School is back in session and this is a great time to look at the steps you can take to help reduce the chances of a head lice infestation.

1. Inspection: Check your child's scalp at least once a week for evidence of head lice. By the time a child starts scratching, she may have had lice for 30 days. Some children with head lice never scratch.

Look closely at the nape of the neck and behind the ears. You may not see any adult lice, but you may find the eggs or "nits." Lice lay their eggs close to the scalp. The eggs are attached to individual hair shafts.

If your child's school sends a note home reporting head lice in your child's classroom or play group, check your child's scalp more often.

2. Combs and Brushes: Everyone in the



Inspect your child's scalp for evidence of head lice.

house should have their own hair care items. This includes combs, brushes and hair accessories. Store the items in separate bins or containers. Make it a routine practice to clean hair items.

3. Hair Styles: If your child has long hair, pull it back into a ponytail, braid or put the hair up when your child is at school or participating in activities. Short hair cuts are easier to manage if you happen to get a lice infestation, than longer styles.

4. Sharing: Teach your child not to share hats, hair accessories or combs with their friends at school or playmates in the neighborhood.

5. School: Work with the teachers, health specialists and administrators in your school. If you find head lice on your

child, report it immediately. The school can check the other children in the class and send a note home to parents asking for their help monitoring for head lice. By working with your school, you can help prevent reinfestations.

Head lice are found in children of all socioeconomic classes. They are very contagious and spread easily. If you find head lice on your child, there is no need to panic. Head lice do not carry serious disease. Taking appropriate action quickly is the best way to prevent the infestation of other family members. Parents should also remain calm because you'll need the cooperation of your child to successfully treat the lice.

Resources to help you safely and effectively manage head lice are available from the Lancaster County extension office. You can also check out the "Head Lice Resources You Can Trust" Web site at <http://lanaster.unl.edu/pest/lice>. The site features researched-based information on head lice treatments and photos. You can also view the award winning video "Removing Head Lice Safely" online at your convenience.

Household Hazardous Waste Collections

These collections are for household only; not for businesses. Only residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County can bring items to collections.

Saturday, Sept. 20, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
Veyance Technologies (Goodyear) 4021 North 56 St., includes Usable Latex Paint Exchange

Friday, Oct. 17, 3–7 p.m.
Waverly County Shop, 11251 North 141 St.

Saturday, Oct. 18, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
Lincoln Industries, 600 West E St.

Saturday, Nov. 15, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
State Fair Park (4-H Youth Complex)

Some items you can bring for disposal:

Thermometers, thermostats containing mercury, solvents, oil-based paint, paint thinner, pesticides, (even banned products like DDT), items containing PCB's (ballasts from fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances). Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL's) contain mercury and will be accepted. On Sept. 20 only, you may bring latex paint for the paint exchange.

Do not bring: asbestos, tires, batteries, used oil, antifreeze, medicines, fertilizers, explosives and ammunition.

Still unsure what you have will be acceptable?
Call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040.