

On Pesticide

What is a pesticide?

A pesticide is any substance or mixture of substances intended for preventing, destroying, repelling, or mitigating any pest.

Though often misunderstood to refer only to insecticides, the term pesticide also applies to herbicides, fungicides, and various other substances used to control pests.

Under United States law, a pesticide is also any substance or mixture of substances intended for use as a plant regulator, defoliant, or desiccant.

What is a pest?

Pests are living organisms that occur where they are not wanted or that cause damage to crops or humans or other animals. Examples include: insects, mice and other animals, unwanted plants (weeds), fungi, microorganisms such as bacteria and viruses, and prions.

Do household products contain pesticides?

Many household products are pesticides. All of these common products are considered pesticides: Cockroach sprays and baits Insect repellents for personal use. Rat and other rodent poisons. Flea and tick sprays, powders, and pet collars. Kitchen, laundry, and bath disinfectants and sanitizers. Products that kill mold and mildew. Some lawn and garden products, such as weed killers. Some swimming pool chemicals.

What is the balance between the risks and benefits of pesticides?

By their very nature, most pesticides create some risk of harm - Pesticides can cause harm to humans, animals, or the environment because they are designed to kill or otherwise adversely affect living organisms.

At the same time, pesticides are useful to society - Pesticides can kill potential disease-causing organisms and control insects, weeds, and other pests.

Are some pesticides safer than others?

Biologically-based pesticides, such as pheromones and microbial pesticides are becoming increasingly popular and often are safer than traditional chemical pesticides. In addition, EPA is registering reduced-risk conventional pesticides in increasing numbers.

What about pest control devices?

A pest control "device" is any instrument or contrivance (other than a firearm) intended for trapping, destroying, repelling, or mitigating any pest. A black light trap is an example of a device.

Unlike pesticides, EPA does not require devices to be registered with the Agency. Devices are subject to certain labeling, packaging, record keeping, and import/export requirements, however. In addition, the establishment where a device is produced must be registered with EPA who will assign an Establishment Number.

What substances are not regulated as pesticides?

The U.S. definition of pesticides is quite broad, but it does have some exclusions:

Drugs used to control diseases of humans or animals (such as livestock and pets) are not considered pesticides; such drugs are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.

Fertilizers, nutrients, and other substances used to promote plant survival and health are not considered plant growth regulators and thus are not pesticides.

Biological control agents, except for certain microorganisms, are exempted from regulation by EPA. (Biological control agents include beneficial predators such as birds or ladybugs that eat insect pests.)

Products which contain certain low-risk ingredients, such as garlic and mint oil, have been exempted from Federal registration requirements, although State regulatory requirements may still apply. For a list of ingredients which may be exempt, and a discussion of allowable label claims for such products.