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Industry Responds to JAMA Report on Incidence of Pesticide Exposure at Schools

WASHINGTON, DC, July 26 -- A report scheduled for release in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) "Acute Illnesses Associated With Pesticide Exposure at Schools," should get an "A for 'alarmist' and an 'Incomplete' grade for its health reporting", according to Allen James, president of RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)®, a pesticide industry trade group.

"We are very concerned about any actual incidents of pesticide mishandling and the possible exposure of school children. However, the JAMA report is incomplete in that it fails to confirm whether there were actual incidents that caused illnesses. Instead, the authors compiled a collection of allegations and case reports about possible exposures," James said.

"Unfortunately, the JAMA report is written without context about the proper use of pesticides in schools and does not mention the positive public health protections they provide to our children," said James. "It appears that the author's bias is towards reducing pesticide use which is alarming because the public health protections that pesticides afford students and school staff are significant."

"School districts throughout the United States understand the importance of protecting students against health threats from rodents, pests and disease-carrying insects," James said. "The fact that roaches can exacerbate asthma symptoms should be reason enough to use pest control products to control those pests." Five million children in the U.S. suffer from asthma, according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.

"Mosquitoes and ticks are real health threats to our children and pesticides help safeguard public health by reducing waterborne and insect-transmitted diseases such as Lyme disease and West Nile virus," he said. "It is difficult to estimate how many illnesses have been prevented in schools by the proper use of pesticides, but the numbers are considerable, perhaps millions," he stated

"We believe the report actually reflects the very small amount of cases resulting in illness from pesticide exposure. According to the JAMA, "the incidence rates for 1998-2002 were 7.4 cases per million children." The article states that among the 2,593 individuals with reported symptoms,

"three cases of high severity illness were identified. There were no fatalities reported."

"Nearly one third of the exposures reported related to sanitizers and disinfectants. These products require use every school day in kitchens, bathrooms and health areas to protect against serious disease infections. The incidence of exposure, considering daily use, is extremely small, while the benefit is tremendous," James added.

James said that RISE does support the JAMA authors' recommendations for implementing school integrated pest management programs. "Beginning with the establishment by Congress in 1996 of a clear definition of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), the pesticide industry has encouraged the development of IPM programs in schools and worked with school systems to implement them." IPM is defined by federal law as a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools in a way that minimizes health and environmental risks.

RISE is a national trade association representing the manufacturers, formulators, and distributors of fertilizers and pest control products used in and around homes, businesses and public areas that promotes the safe and responsible use of these products. To learn more about RISE, visit our website at: www.pestfacts.org.

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