

Executive Summary

More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are sprayed on American landscapes every year, which can hurt both human health and the environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is tasked with ensuring that every pesticide product sold in the United States is safe.

New research is regularly published detailing the harms associated with using pesticides, so it's important that regulatory agencies adapt to incorporate this constantly emerging science and ensure that previously approved pesticides, as they're found to be too harmful, are effectively phased out. However, the EPA generally takes a hands-off approach when it comes to removing pesticides from use, opting to incentivize the development of purportedly lower-risk alternatives and wait for pesticide companies to voluntarily cancel dangerous pesticides. Many extremely harmful pesticides that are banned elsewhere are still widely used in the United States, indicating that the EPA's deferential regulatory approach to pesticides is not working.

For this report we conducted an extensive search of new pesticide products that have been approved by the EPA in recent years. Our analysis found that the agency is actively working against its own efforts to incentivize the replacement of older, more dangerous pesticides by approving new pesticide products that contain these same dangerous ingredients.

Key finding: In 2017 and 2018, the EPA approved more than 100 pesticide products containing ingredients widely considered to be the most dangerous still in use, including some that have been banned in multiple countries or targeted for phaseout in the United States. Roughly a third of all approved products had more than one active ingredient.

Pesticide products approved by the EPA in 2017 and 2018 include:

- 15 new products containing neurotoxic carbamates or organophosphates, including chlorpyrifos;
- 17 new products containing the endocrine disruptor atrazine;
- 6 new products containing paraquat, which is so lethal that one spoonful can kill a full-grown adult;
- 4 new products containing the extremely dangerous airborne fumigants methyl bromide or chloropicrin;
- 91 new restricted-use pesticides, which are so dangerous that they can only be applied by a professional;
- 69 new products containing an ingredient the EPA recognizes as a "known" or "likely" carcinogen.

In addition to containing harmful individual ingredients, we found that 1 in every 3 products that have been approved in the past two years contains more than one active ingredient, despite the fact that toxicity is only measured by exposure to a single active ingredient at a time.

This indicates that the EPA is not only *allowing* some of the most harmful pesticides to continue to be used but actively *facilitating* their further use by approving new products with those same ingredients. Shockingly, this is even the case for highly hazardous pesticides for which the EPA has *mandated use reductions or incentivized replacement*, like organophosphates, methyl bromide and atrazine.

The agency currently justifies its numerous approvals of new pesticide active ingredients as a way of replacing and phasing out older, presumably more dangerous pesticide ingredients. Yet in the past two years it has approved many more products with these older ingredients than products with the newer ingredients that were supposed to replace them.

This study highlights a brazenly ineffective pesticide regulatory process by which the EPA prioritizes and incentivizes newer chemicals on the front end while failing to ensure that older, harmful pesticides are promptly being phased out on the back end. The agency's lack of follow-through and permissive product-approval process have worked together to promote use of the world's dirtiest, most dangerous pesticides.

Recommendation: The EPA must act to stop the approval of new products that contain the most dangerous active ingredients and take decisive action in phasing out the worst-of-the-worst pesticides.