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Chemicals and spray drift

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Summary

- If you use chemicals, think about the steps you can take to reduce the risk of chemical drift.
- Dispose of unwanted chemicals and chemical containers properly to avoid contaminating the environment.
- There are a number of agencies you can contact if you have concerns about sprayed chemicals.

Chemicals are sprayed to control pests and diseases on farms, around the home and in gardens, parks and reserves. When chemicals are used, droplets are produced that can remain suspended in air and may be carried by wind away from the target area. This is known as 'spray drift'.

Chemical spray drift cannot always be contained or controlled completely, despite correct application. Chemical sprays may drift over neighbouring properties or waterways and can affect human health, animals or the environment. Spray drift can affect household and farm water supplies, including tank water.

If you are concerned that you or those around you may have been exposed to chemical spray drift, there are a number of agencies you can contact for help. Their numbers are listed in the **Where to get help** section of this fact sheet.

In an emergency, dial triple zero (000) to contact police, fire and ambulance emergency services.

Causes of chemical spray drift

Activities that can result in chemical spray drift include:

- **spraying agricultural chemicals** – such as pesticides on farms, gardens and roadside reserves using tractors, boom sprayers or by aerial spraying
- **disinfecting animal houses** – such as poultry sheds. Speak with your local fumigation expert
- **Fumigating warehouses** – for example, grain stores.

Public health concerns and chemicals

Drifting chemicals can affect the public by causing:

- Actual health effects although these are usually short term and happen rarely
- Stress or anxiety about possible longer-term health effects
- Concerns about the odour or general air pollution.

Health impacts of exposure to chemicals

The potential health impacts of exposure to chemical spray drift depend on:

- how close the person is to the application of the chemical
- the amount of drift
- the toxicity of the chemical
- the nature and extent of exposure through inhalation or skin
- the duration of exposure.

After contact with chemical sprays

If you come into contact with chemical sprays:

- Wash off any spray that has landed on your skin.
- Change into clean clothes.
- Contact the Victorian Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 for urgent advice about treating any symptoms of poisoning.
- Contact your local doctor if you are concerned about any effects on your health.
- Contact your local council's environmental health officer for assistance with any further actions.
- If the chemical contact occurred at your workplace, contact your local office of WorkSafe Victoria.
- If you know which chemical you were exposed to, contact the manufacturer or supplier for advice. Ask them for a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for that chemical.

Organisations to contact about spray drift

If you are concerned that chemical sprays may be affecting public health, animals or the environment, you can get further information and assistance from:

betterhealth.vic.gov.au

- **your local council's environmental health officer** – if you are concerned that the sprays may affect public health. This would include people being directly exposed to spray drift or concern about spray drift affecting private drinking water or vegetable gardens
- **Department of Primary Industries, Customer Service Centre** – if you are concerned that the sprays may affect livestock or agricultural crops. This may include concerns about spray drift affecting your commercial organic produce
- **WorkSafe Victoria** – if you are concerned about workplace practices that may affect the health of workers or the public onsite or on adjoining properties. WorkSafe Victoria has the power to investigate occupational health issues that occur as a result of work activities
- **Environment Protection Authority (EPA)** – if you are concerned that sprays may cause pollution of waterways, air or land
- **ChemClear** – for the management of unwanted rural or veterinary chemicals
- **Sustainability Victoria, Detox Your Home** – for information on detoxing your home
- **Poisons Information Centre** – for advice about personal exposure and appropriate first aid
- **Department of Health Environmental Health Unit** – for general information about chemicals.

Chemical sprays and tank water

If you use tank water and chemical spray lands on your roof, disconnect the collection pipe from your rainwater tank to prevent any chemicals from entering the tank. Divert water away from the tank until it has rained or until the roof has been cleaned.

If you think your tank has been contaminated, contact your local council's environmental health officer for advice.

Standards for chemical sprays

If you use chemical sprays, you should be familiar with the *Guide to using agricultural chemicals in Victoria*. Contact the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Customer Service Centre or DPI Chemical Standards Officer for information about agricultural spray application methods.

Things to consider when spraying chemicals

Before you spray chemicals, you are required to consider:

- how close you are to sensitive areas such as schools, hospitals, sensitive crops, waterways, livestock, organic farms and bee foraging areas
- providing prior notification to dwellings adjoining the property being sprayed to enable neighbours to take preventative measures. The notification should include the type of chemical being used, when (date and appropriate time), steps taken to avoid spray drift and a contact number
- the correct application as chemicals must be applied in accordance with labelling directions
- the toxicity of the chemical you intend to use
- the weather conditions, for example don't spray if it's too windy or if it's completely still
- the size of the chemical droplets; how far will they drift?
- whether your application equipment is in good condition and is appropriate for local conditions
- whether it is the ideal season to spray. Some pests are resistant to chemicals at certain times of the year.

Disposing of chemical containers

Environmental contamination can occur if containers are not stored or disposed of correctly. When disposing of chemical containers, contact:

- your local council for information about chemical collection days
- the chemical supplier
- ChemClear for the management of unwanted agricultural or veterinary chemicals.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- Your local council's environmental health officer
- Department of Primary Industries Customer Service Centre Tel. 136 186
- WorkSafe Victoria
 - Advisory Service Tel. 1800 136 089 or (03) 9641 1444
 - Emergency Response Line Tel. 132 360 (24 hours, 7 days)
- Environment Protection Authority Tel. 1300 EPA VIC (372 842) or (03) 9695 2777 (24 hours, 7 days)
- ChemClear Tel. (02) 6230 4799
- Sustainability Victoria, Detox Your Home Tel. 1800 353 233
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre Tel. 13 11 26 (24 hours, 7 days) – for advice about poisonings, suspected poisonings, bites and stings, mistakes with medicines and poisoning prevention advice
- Department of Health Environmental Health Unit Tel. 1300 761 874

Things to remember

- If you use chemicals, think about the steps you can take to reduce the risk of chemical drift.
- Dispose of unwanted chemicals and chemical containers properly to avoid contaminating the environment.
- There are a number of agencies you can contact if you have concerns about sprayed chemicals.

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Please note that we cannot answer personal medical queries.
If you are looking for health or medical advice we recommend that you:

- talk to your doctor or pharmacist
- dial triple zero (000) in an emergency
- ring NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24.

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- [Water from natural resources](#)

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[Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe...](#)

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[The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health...](#)

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[The humble egg is a powerhouse of nutritional goodness. Eggs are full of things your body needs. They are a great source of protein, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals \(such as vitamin A, vitamin D...](#)

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Related information on other websites

- [Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority](#)
- [National Centre for Farmer Health](#)
- [Victorian Department of Primary Industries – Australian Plague Locust Control](#)
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