

## Illnesses blamed on spraying in Santa Cruz

Jane Kay, Chronicle Environment Writer  
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Day after day in Santa Cruz, the aerial spraying was delayed by the thickness of the November fog.

At the Santa Cruz Toddler Care Center, the staff hired a handyman to pull in playground equipment and tables and chairs, and put tarps over lawns and sandboxes. In the morning, he'd put it all back outside and remove the tarps.

"We did it for five nights," said Nora Caruso, program director of the 30-year-old nonprofit center. She read the advice from the state agriculture department directing residents to bring in pets and clothes from the line and lay down tarps.

None of the 24 toddlers in her care seemed to have any ill effects after the spraying. But she did. The day after the spray, Caruso had tightness in her chest and shortness of breath.

"I'm a healthy, active 40-year-old. In the last few years, I've had asthma twice only due to a severe respiratory illness," Caruso said.

Her doctor found no infection, no signs of a cold, and submitted a pesticide illness report to the state.

Caruso has been working with a citizens group, California Alliance to Stop the Spray, and has had dozens of talks with people who couldn't afford to go to physicians for follow-up or didn't bother because they weren't certain their health problems were serious enough to mention or even connected to the spray. But she's collected stories of a range of problems from rashes and sore throats to sick pets.

After the spraying, it rained in Santa Cruz, leaving pools of contaminated water, residents say.

Sheryl Kern-Jones said she got sick when she tried to clean up the mess in her backyard. First it was only burning eyes. When she went back to finish pouring the rainwater into bags, she started feeling pain when she'd release a breath. The pain lasted six days.

Hope Morales, who lives in downtown Santa Cruz and is partially blind, said she stayed inside, but the pesticides sprayed from the planes invaded her Victorian home. It left her with burning eyes, and she



came down with a deep cough, she said.

Lucette Spitzer lives in the hills behind Aptos. Her neighborhood wasn't being sprayed, but she went to Santa Cruz to meet a friend for dinner. The spraying date had been uncertain because the planes were delayed waiting for clear skies. Residents were told to check online every day at 5 p.m.

"When I left the restaurant to go to my car at 8 p.m., they were spraying. It's a time when people are out and about," Spitzer said.

After the spraying, Spitzer said she felt like she was getting the flu, and ended up with a migraine that lasted a week. "I'm not a hypochondriac," she said. "I don't go into a flap and make myself sick by thinking about things."

In Santa Cruz County, Dr. Poki Stewart Namkung, the county's health officer, said she has concerns regarding the spraying. There have been no long-term animal studies on the products, she said. "I don't think anyone knows what the long-term health effects will be."

Namkung has conferred with San Francisco's director of environmental health, Dr. Rajiv Bhatia, who is also an epidemiologist, and submitted comments to the environmental review now being prepared by the state agricultural department.

In a letter, Namkung asked for a complete review that includes a comprehensive human health assessment before it launches any more spraying forays. The assessment should include effects of the products, the active and inert ingredients, alone and in mixture; effects related to the microcapsule carrier of the product, including toxicity and impact of inhalation; atmospheric behavior of the product; persistence in the environment; potential routes of exposure; and identification of sensitive populations.

Namkung also recommended that the state examine alternatives to aerial applications in urban areas. "Proposing to spray an urban population every month for nine months of the year for the next two to three years is unprecedented," she said.

*E-mail Jane Kay at [jkay@sfgate.com](mailto:jkay@sfgate.com).*

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