

● SKILLS

PHOTOGRAPHING A SPRAY INCIDENT

In the event that you need to demonstrate proof of damage from pesticides, photographs or videotape can be invaluable. Photos can also be useful in making public presentations, or when working with elected officials. Whatever your purpose, obtaining useful photographs poses some challenges and attention to a few details is necessary.

Basic Hints

If you are fortunate enough to have advance notification of an application, take "before" shots of areas likely to receive spray. Use a variety of camera angles and settings.

During a spray operation, there are a number of important elements to document. 1) Capture the *who*, namely the vehicles, logos, and license plates of the applicators. 2) If possible, get close-ups of the *what*, including the equipment, products, packaging, labels, and warnings. 3) Document the *how* by taking a number of action shots in an effort to capture pesticide haze or mist, being sure to use a number of camera settings and angles. 4) Remember to include the *where* by highlighting your property line, a street sign, or other landmarks.

"I can't emphasize enough how important context is to an effective photograph or videotape," says Norma Grier, NCAP's executive director. "Some members in Oregon attempted to document a helicopter spray operation in which forest herbicides were applied directly to a creek, but they neglected to pan down to the creek itself. All you could see was treetops, so it could have been anywhere, and the video did not advance their case. It was heartbreaking."

Holly Knight is a former NCAP staff member.

For all photographs, it is important to make a note of who took them, where they were taken, the date, and time of day. "Such basic information is important to your case," says Art Johnson of the law firm Johnson, Clifton, Larson, and Corson. "You have to be able to say that this photograph fairly represents what you saw there on this date and at this time."

Herbicide Photos

After a pesticide application has occurred, watch what happens to target areas and compare. Ed Barrons of the Oregon Department of Agriculture points out that, in the case of herbicides, damage may not appear immediately or all at once. "If herbicides are applied on a cool March day, the vegetation may not show symptoms until it is 60 degrees and the plants are actively growing."

Because damage is likely to appear over time, take pictures periodically and document symptoms (i.e., plant deformities or stunted growth) as they appear and evolve. Such photographs benefit

from the inclusion of an object that conveys scale, such as a pencil or ruler, and attention to the background. It may be necessary to use a sheet of white paper or a piece of cardboard to focus attention on a specific plant. Additional proof of damage can be demonstrated by photographs of thriving plants nearby that did not receive drift.

Insecticide Photos

Documenting insecticide drift can be a tougher task, especially after the fact. Bob Merkel of the Washington State Department of Agriculture has learned to look for photographable evidence in less obvious places. He searches for dried droplets on car windshields and tires, children's play equipment, and windows that face the neighboring property.

On a final note, whatever you do, do it safely and legally. If you are able to document the application itself, consider wearing personal protective equipment, and take care to avoid drift. Also, do not enter private property unless you obtain express permission from the landowner or you risk criminal trespassing charges.

In short, put your safety first and take as many pictures as you legally can!

—Holly Knight

Information for this article was obtained during interviews with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and the law firm of Johnson, Clifton, Larson, and Corson.



An NCAP member photographed this Oregon Department of Transportation truck spraying a mail box.

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