



COUNTY OF SISKIYOU

Board of Supervisors

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September 16, 2025

Nancy Ward, Director
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
3650 Schriever Avenue
Mather, CA 95655

Subject: Update on Siskiyou County Pesticide Amnesty Program and First Responder Safety

Dear Director Ward,

The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors is providing this letter to update you on our ongoing efforts to address illegal pesticide use associated with illicit cannabis cultivation operations and to share recent developments regarding first responder safety. These efforts include implementing a local Pesticide Amnesty Program and improving protections for personnel who respond to sites where illegal pesticides are present.

To provide context, we would like to highlight two recent incidents where County personnel were directly exposed to illegal pesticides while performing their duties.

On May 13, 2025, law enforcement served a search warrant for marijuana eradication at an illegal grow site where an unknown pesticide was burning and emitting smoke. Six agents, including four County employees, reported symptoms of tightness in the chest, coughing, sore throat, and sinus discharge. In the days following, they also experienced severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and night sweats. All six sought emergency hospital treatment and received blood tests to measure exposure levels. Several of the agents had return emergency hospital visits and will require additional follow-up medical visits. All six agents were removed from field duties for 30 days, after which further blood testing was conducted to establish a baseline.

On June 3, 2025, two Siskiyou County Code Enforcement officers developed acute symptoms of headache, nausea, weakness, chills, sweating, and blurred vision following an inspection at another illegal cultivation site where pesticides were present. Both officers sought emergency hospital treatment for their exposure.

To reduce risks to staff, the County has strengthened its protective measures. The Sheriff's Office is planning to conduct baseline blood testing for task force staff this winter, following a 30-day period away from field work. Staff will also be tested in the event of exposure incidents or if they experience symptoms in the future, to compare with their baseline. Siskiyou County has purchased additional protective equipment, including respirators, initial entry gas masks, boot covers, protective suits, and nitrile gloves, which staff are directed to use upon entry of sites suspected of containing illegal pesticides. The County has also developed updated standard operating procedures and training to help staff identify and mitigate risks.

The risks from illegal pesticide use extend beyond County enforcement personnel to first responders, including firefighters. Recently, while mopping up hot spots in a known cannabis grow area following a fire, a CAL FIRE employee developed burns on his legs that a physician diagnosed as resulting from chemical exposure. In response, CAL FIRE has implemented new internal recommendations for staff, including wearing N95 respirators during firefighting and mop-up operations at or near illegal cannabis operations, and providing additional training on addressing hazards associated with illegal pesticides.

To complement these efforts to protect County staff and first responders, the County launched a Pesticide Amnesty Program in partnership with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation to allow individuals to voluntarily surrender illegal pesticides for proper disposal. The first collection event, held on August 13, 2025, resulted in 48 items totaling about 50 pounds. Most of these were surrendered by a single individual on behalf of others. A second event, held on September 10, 2025, saw significantly higher participation. About 100 growers surrendered items for disposal, and many community members attended to learn about the dangers of illegal pesticide use. Although only 10 pounds of pesticides were surrendered at the second event, the strong turnout reflected growing public awareness and willingness to participate in safe disposal.

Despite these efforts, the scale of the threat continues to exceed local capacity. Illegal pesticide use remains a persistent danger to public health, the environment, and first responders in Siskiyou County. We greatly appreciate the ongoing support and coordination from your office and partner agencies. Any additional resources and assistance that can be provided will be instrumental in helping us address this urgent and evolving problem.

This letter was approved by the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors on September 16, 2025, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

Sincerely,

Nancy Ogren, Chair
Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors

CC: Governor Gavin Newsom
Secretary Yana Garcia, CalEPA
Director Nicole Elliott, Department of Cannabis Control
Director Charlton H. Bonham, CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Senator Megan Dahle
Assemblymember Heather Hadwick
Siskiyou County Environmental Health Department
Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors
Rural County Representatives of California
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Ray Haupt
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