

Imprelis: DuPont's Weed (and Tree) Killer

Since 2008, we've been reporting on the dangers of pyralid herbicides (including Milestone, Forefront and other trade names), which turn grass clippings, manure or hay into killer compost or mulch that can ruin gardens and farmland for years.

Despite ample evidence that these deadly herbicides are damaging fields and gardens—and despite our calls for the companies and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to solve this problem—we learned another dangerous pyralid herbicide, aminocyclopyrachlor, had been widely sold in the spring of 2011 following its approval by the EPA in August 2010. Invented by scientists at DuPont and sold as “Imprelis,” aminocyclopyrachlor was marketed to control weeds in cool-season lawn grasses, especially bluegrass.

After one season of use, Imprelis has been implicated in the injury or death of thousands of trees. And what will happen when the chipped wood from poisoned trees ends up at compost facilities? DuPont never denied Imprelis-treated lawns would create killer compost. Lost in a 19-item bulleted list on Page 7 of the nine-page Imprelis label (to read it, go to goo.gl/277j9), we found this language:

“Do not use grass clippings from treated areas for mulching or compost, or allow for collection to composting facilities. Grass clippings must either be left on the treated area, or, if allowed by local yard waste regulations, disposed of in the trash. Applicators must give verbal or written notice to property owner/property managers/residents to not use grass clippings from treated turf for mulch or compost.”

Come on, people! How likely is it that most users will remember this from a 9-page label, let alone warn others not to use clippings for hay, mulch or compost? Despite our knowledge of the severe problems these herbicides are causing, the EPA continues to allow chemical companies to sell them and hide behind their “the label is the law” excuse by putting unrealistic instructions and a liability release on the product labels.

Somehow, DuPont's “over 400 field trial protocols” failed to detect that Imprelis would kill trees. As damage reports began to surface in late spring,

DuPont's response was to send a letter to turf management professionals asking for help as they “continue their work.” The letter said “to be careful that no spray treatment, drift or runoff occurs that could make contact with trees, shrubs or other desirable plants, and stay well away from exposed roots and the root zone of trees and shrubs” when applying Imprelis.

It also said to “consult a certified arborist if you are uncertain about the root zone of specific tree species.” Tree roots often spread three times as wide as the branches, so following these guidelines, few properties could be safely treated with Imprelis.

On July 5, 2011, DuPont issued recommendations for handling trees affected by aminocyclopyrachlor. The company's justification for selling this deeply flawed product was that it had been approved by the

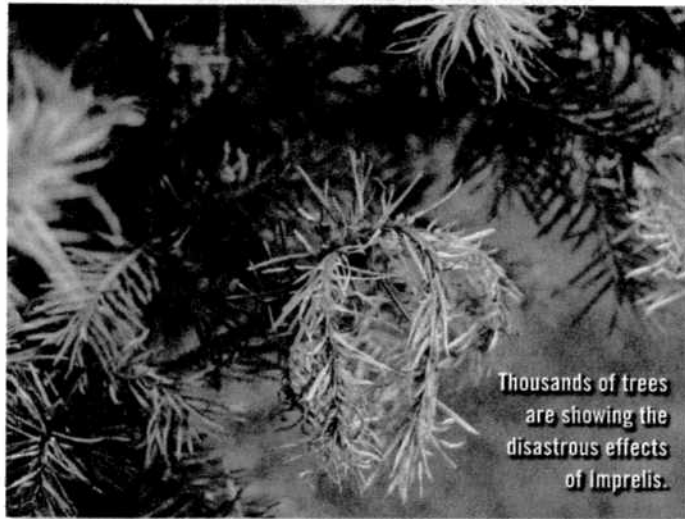
EPA. We think the government shouldn't have to force chemical companies to do the right thing, but regardless, the EPA must stop allowing herbicides to be registered with such unrealistic guidelines for legal uses.

On Aug. 5, DuPont finally halted sales of Imprelis after the EPA threatened to force it to do so. As we go to press, university extension services in 22 states have received reports of damage consistent with that caused by Imprelis, and a team of specialists at Purdue University has stated this chemical should not be used until we know more about its effects (read more at goo.gl/9cilh). Numerous lawsuits have been filed alleging damage from what DuPont labeled “the most scientifically advanced turf herbicide in over 40 years.”

The world is running out of oil, and that means we are running out of chemical fertilizer. We must expand our systems to capture and recycle organic materials if we are to maintain the fertility of our soils.

You can express your concern about persistent herbicides to Dan Kenny, EPA herbicide branch chief: 703-305-7546; kenny.dan@epa.gov. To contact DuPont directly, call its Imprelis hotline at 866-796-4783 or email Mike Kuflik, DuPont sales manager for U.S. turf and ornamentals: michael.d.kuflik@usa.dupont.com.

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