

## Patricia D. Hastings

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Press Release: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
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*(Ed. Note: Although this story focuses on Puerto Rico, the Urban Illegal Pesticides Initiative also focuses on New York and New Jersey.)*

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### EPA DRAWS ATTENTION TO HAZARDS OF ILLEGAL PESTICIDES IN PUERTO RICO

For Release: Wednesday, September 29, 2004

(#04150) SAN JUAN -- In San Juan, Puerto Rico today, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator Jane M. Kenny and officials of the Poison Control Center, joined together to draw attention to the dangers of illegal pesticides used by residents to combat roaches and rodents in their homes. Ms. Kenny unveiled a new Spanish language brochure and poster that provide information about illegal pesticides and the health risks they pose, especially for children.

"Make no mistake about it, illegal pesticides are highly toxic and they are sold every day on the streets of Puerto Rico," said EPA's Kenny. "By educating consumers not to purchase these products and businesses not to import and sell them, EPA and our partners can help protect countless adults and children from unnecessary harm."

These products are often introduced into Puerto Rico illegally, and sold on the streets in the metropolitan area. **In 2004, there have been 15 reported incidences of pesticides poisonings on the island.** To address this problem, EPA developed an **Urban Illegal Pesticides Initiative** to warn communities about the hazards of such products, and to inform shopkeepers that it is illegal to sell them.

EPA is conducting this public service campaign in Puerto Rico because many of these highly toxic illegal pesticides are arriving there after being imported from the Dominican Republic and China. Spanish-speaking residents may be inclined to purchase these products because the labels on some of them are in their tongue.

From an inspection of over 90 large and mid-sized stores, markets and flea markets in Puerto Rico, EPA inspectors and representatives from other state and federal agencies found 47 locations with different kinds of illegal pesticides. In the sweep, over 2,000 boxes of "**Chinese chalk**", a potentially lethal pesticide packaged like a child's piece of chalk, were removed from the shelves. Over 600 packets of **Tres Pasitos**, another potentially fatal rodent poison which looks like crushed black pepper, were confiscated. EPA put the stores on notice that they are breaking the law. Those that ignore the warning could face cash penalties. In fact, since 2000, EPA has collected nearly \$1 million in penalties from stores on the mainland that sold illegal pesticides.

Before any pesticide is sold in the U.S., it must go through EPA's vigorous registration process, dictated by the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). During this process, companies must provide certain health studies and environmental information about the product to ensure that its proper use does not cause any undue negative human or environmental effects. If EPA decides to register the product, it

grants the manufacturer an EPA registration number, which is listed on the product. EPA also works closely with the manufacturer on the label language, to make sure that it is clear and as specific regarding product use.

"Before purchasing any pesticides, look for the EPA registration number on the container," said Ms. Kenny. "If the product does not have an EPA number, it is illegal. This is the first action of this type in Puerto Rico, and EPA will continue to enforce the law and prevent illegal pesticides from being sold here."

Since illegal products never go through EPA's pesticide registration process, the Agency does not have any information about what chemicals these products contain, how toxic they may be, or what their effects might be on people. Many of these illegal pesticides contain label language that is misleading: many make claims of safety and efficacy that have not been proven. They are also often much more toxic than any product EPA would register for use in the home, thus putting the purchaser and his or her family at grave risk.

For more information about illegal pesticides, their health effects, and how to dispose of them, please call the National Pesticide Information Center at 1-800-858-PEST.

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See EPA's webpage on Illegal pesticides at <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/health/illegalproducts/>

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