

CDC seeks information on zinc phosphide pesticide poisoning of veterinary staff

The AVMA recently was contacted by an Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) officer with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and asked to distribute a request. They are seeking information about phosphine poisoning in veterinarians. Dr. Tsai's request is below. Please help us spread the word to your members about this request.

My name is Rebecca Tsai and I am an EIS officer at the Surveillance branch in NIOSH. I am working under the supervision of Geoff Calvert. We have recently become aware of events of secondary pesticide poisoning among veterinary staff. In each event, zinc phosphide (Zn_3P_2) was ingested by a dog. As you are probably aware, when zinc phosphide is exposed to water and acid (i.e. stomach acid), phosphine gas is released. Inhalation of this gas can cause physical symptoms, including dizziness, nausea, headaches, and etc. We are currently aware of 4 events, involving 9 cases, across three states, occurring between 2006 and 2010. There were 2 events (5 cases) in Michigan, 1 event (1 case) in Washington, and 1 event (3 cases) in Iowa. The AVMA posted an alert about this problem on their Web site after they were notified about the MI events (http://www.avma.org/public_health/phosphine_gas/default.asp). Since that alert was published we became aware of the WA and IA events. We plan to write an MMWR article detailing the occurrence and outcome of these events to increase awareness of this potential source of pesticide poisoning among both veterinary staff and the general public.

The purpose of this notice is twofold. **First, we are seeking additional cases of human pesticide poisoning that resulted from treating animals that ingested zinc phosphide to include in the MMWR.** Second, the AVMA alert included guidelines for handling pets that ingested zinc phosphide. We plan to integrate these recommendations into the MMWR. However, **we are looking to add additional helpful recommendations.** Please contact me at vht5@cdc.gov or (513) 841-4398 if you have information regarding additional cases (as described above) or have recommendations that would be beneficial to incorporate into the current guidelines. Thank you for your cooperation.