



Department of  
**Community Health**

## **Questions and Answers: Acute health hazard associated with aerosolized waterproofing products**

The MDCH and the Michigan poison centers have received numerous reports of acute lung problems in people and their pets associated with exposure to leather, and tent and other waterproofing products that come in spray cans. As a result, the MDCH is issuing this warning to consumers to use aerosolized waterproofing products *with extreme caution*.

**Always use waterproofing products that come  
in a spray can outdoors.**

**Keep all pets away from the area until the  
product has fully dried.**

Question: The labels on these products suggest they are safe to use in a well-ventilated area, but MDCH is recommending using them only outdoors. Why?

Answer: Some of the reported individuals used the product in a well-ventilated area and still became ill, including some who using it inside tents set up outside with all the flaps open. In fact, some individuals may have only used the product outside. This is why MDCH recommends using these products with EXTREME caution.

Question: Are all waterproofing products hazardous or only a few kinds?

Answer: We don't know at this point, but it appears that some are more toxic than others. There have been some reports of clusters of acute lung illness associated with a number of products. Two products: Wilson's Leather Protector, and Stand 'n Seal Grout Sealer have been recalled by the Consumer Product Safety Commission in the last ten years, but other products have been identified by people who became ill after exposure.

Question: Can I tell which products are safe by reading the label?

Answer: No! These clusters suggest that the more toxic products contain some kind of fluoropolymer. However, the manufacturers are not required to put this on the label, because fluoropolymers by themselves do not appear to be toxic. It may be that they become toxic when

they interact with the other chemical constituents in the can as the contents become aerosolized. Therefore, all brands should be handled with extreme caution.

Question: What are the characteristics of the illness from this exposure?

Answer: Usually within several hours of exposure individuals start becoming short of breath and coughing. They may also develop chest pain, nausea and vomiting, and headache. Clinical signs and symptoms are consistent with chemical pneumonitis, including x-ray findings (pulmonary infiltrates), reduced oxygen in their blood, and breath sounds such as wheezing and crackles. Many of the individuals reported to MDCH and the Michigan poison centers were so sick they had to be hospitalized.

Question: If I use such a product and start having trouble breathing, what should I do?

Answer: Call poison control at 800-222-1222 or, if you are acutely ill, go to your closest hospital emergency room.

Question: What is being done to prevent these illnesses in the future?

Answer: MDCH and the Michigan poison centers are working with the Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to investigate these case reports and understand the cause of the illnesses better, so as to ensure that products marketed to consumers are safe.