

# Greenwich Sentinel

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## *Pesticides and Herbicides: Are They Making Us Sick?*



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So, what are pesticides and herbicides? They are commonly known as weed killers used to control undesirable plants, specifically weeds. The Oxford Dictionary describes them as “a substance that is toxic to plants and is used to destroy unwanted vegetation.”

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2000, I began my quest for knowledge to get my brain around what I was dealing with and fully understand and implement a plan of care to heal my body that worked for me. That research opened my eyes to the harm that pesticides and herbicides present to our bodies and the environment. A few years later, I participated in a study with five other women from across the country. The basis of the study was to determine why breast cancer rates were so high in some of the wealthiest zip codes. With Fairfield County being one of the top regions for breast cancer in the country, I was, of course, interested in learning more. At the conclusion, the scientists

cited the top two links as being pesticide use on lawns and pollution from major highways.

We all understand pollution from highways and especially diesel fuel, but I had not considered that green lawns were making people sick. I thought of my dear dad, who spent decades on golf courses a professional golfer and wondering what harm that might have done to his kidneys and the onset of his renal disease. I will never know for sure, but my gut tells me it was a catalyst. I hear more and more about pets with cancer nowadays, but when I was a kid growing up in Greenwich, our dogs were free to roam and would venture into the woods for play-time. I do not recall one dog that I knew and loved ever having cancer, and my family never used pesticides; rather, my two Italian grandmothers composted and grew massive organic gardens that fed the entire family alongside the dandelions and weeds that were part of the natural beauty surrounding us.

My research also led me to toxins found in most makeup, body products and cleaning solutions. I was shocked when I began reading labels and realized all the toxins hidden behind words like “natural” or “fragrance,” thus sharing this in a chapter in my book called “Ten Synthetic Cosmetic Ingredients to Avoid.”

Here is some additional research to consider. The March/April 2013 issue of *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*

published a review by the U.S. National Cancer Institute and others reporting widespread recognition that exposure by way of food, water, skin and air to many different pesticides are convincingly linked to an increased cancer risk. This was an important report, because it appears in a medical journal that is widely read and was published by the American Cancer Society. It paints a clear path to the link between pesticides and such cancers as breast, leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, lung, brain, pancreatic, stomach, ovarian and kidney.

Some reasons why these carcinogenic pesticides and chemicals can cause cancer are:

- They increase the productions of DNA damaging free radicals.
- They are “endocrine disruptors,” meaning they are able to mimic or block actions of our body’s hormones.
- They cause changes to our DNA because these chemicals can increase the activity of cancer promoting genes and decrease the activity of cancer suppressing genes.
- They are fat soluble, so they can stick around in our fat tissues for years, even decades.

Many plant and weed killing chemicals have been clearly established as carcinogens. The most famous is Monsanto’s “Agent Orange,” a defoliant used in Vietnam; the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs maintains a growing list of medical conditions said to be caused by it.

In June of 2011, the Environmental Working Group produced a list of The Dirty Dozen (most pesticide-laden foods). Sadly, apples made the list, as did cilantro, an herb that helps our bodies detox from heavy metals. The EWG found 33 unapproved chemicals on sample they checked. You can find the list here: <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/list/>.

A report released May 6, 2010 by the President’s Cancer Panel found that the true burden of environmentally induced cancer is greatly underestimated. The report, *Reducing Environmental Cancer Risk: What We Can Do Now*, says that, “while environmental exposure is not a new front on the war on cancer, the grievous harm from carcinogenic chemical use has not been addressed adequately by the nation’s cancer program.”

Each morning I go to what I call my “Office of Health & Wellness,” where I make conscious decisions as to what I will put in my body, on my body and in my brain that day. I hope this will encourage you to do the same and to cherish each day, because health is a precious gift.

*Julia Chiappetta is the author of “Breast Cancer: The Notebook” (Gemini Media, 2006) and is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting. She lives in Cos Cob. Her photo is above right.*