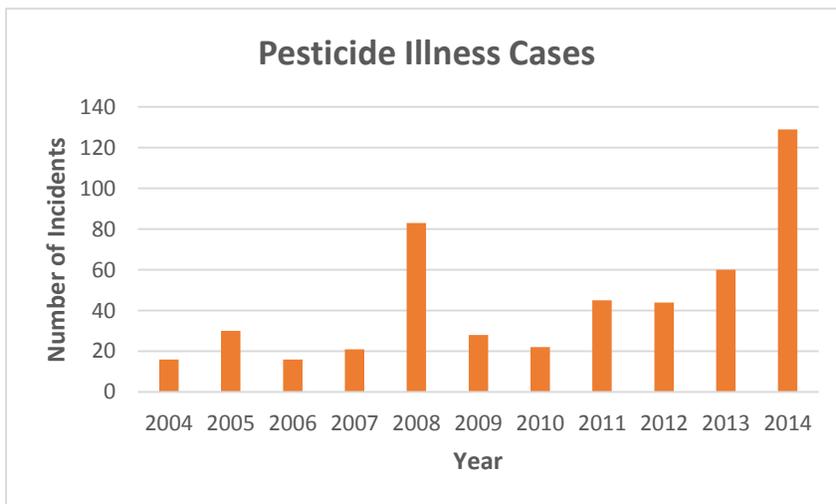


## Protect Rural Community Health: Pass the Pesticide Drift Bill

Each year in Washington State, dozens of people are exposed to pesticides through **pesticide drift**. Drift occurs when pesticides are blown beyond their targets and inadvertently land on people, leaving them with flu-like symptoms. Washington’s Department of Health (DOH) reports that those most harmed by pesticide drift are often workers on neighboring farms, people passing by, and in some cases, children in nearby schools. In fact, a 2014 study by the University of California Davis found that for pregnant women living near areas where pesticides are applied, **their chance of having a child with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders was increased by two-thirds.**<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, when farmworkers are exposed and must miss precious days of the growing season to recover, **Washington’s agricultural industry loses hundreds of valuable labor hours.**



DOH staff reported to the Legislature in April that, **“In 2014 we had more [drift] events and many more illness cases than we had ever seen before in the [last] 25 years.”**<sup>2</sup> However, she pointed out that incidents are drastically underreported. Another DOH study in 2004 found that while **75% of Washington farmworkers** report having experienced symptoms from pesticide exposure in focus

groups, many of them would not report the incidents out of fear of retaliation or seek medical attention for financial reasons.<sup>3</sup>

### Washington State can and must do more

In 2015, OneAmerica conducted a statewide community survey, finding that **nearly 70%** of respondents in Central Washington reported that **the most pressing issue facing them was pollution from pesticides.** DOH data shows that drift is the leading source of pesticide illness. The Washington Department of Agriculture concurs: “[pesticide] **drift events continue to be a troublesome source of pesticide exposure** for farmworkers and bystanders.”<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, because most drift events affect multiple people, DOH finds that, “small reductions in the number of drift events can result in larger reductions in illnesses caused by pesticides in Washington.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shelton JF, et al. Neurodevelopmental disorders and prenatal residential proximity to agricultural pesticides: the CHARGE study. *Environ Health Perspect* 122(10):1103–1109 (2014); doi: [10.1289/ehp.1307044](https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1307044).

<sup>2</sup> House Health Care & Wellness Committee work session. Available at <http://bit.ly/1RBallr>.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health, “Improving Data Quality in Pesticide Illness Surveillance” (2004). Available at <http://ow.ly/WQd8P>.

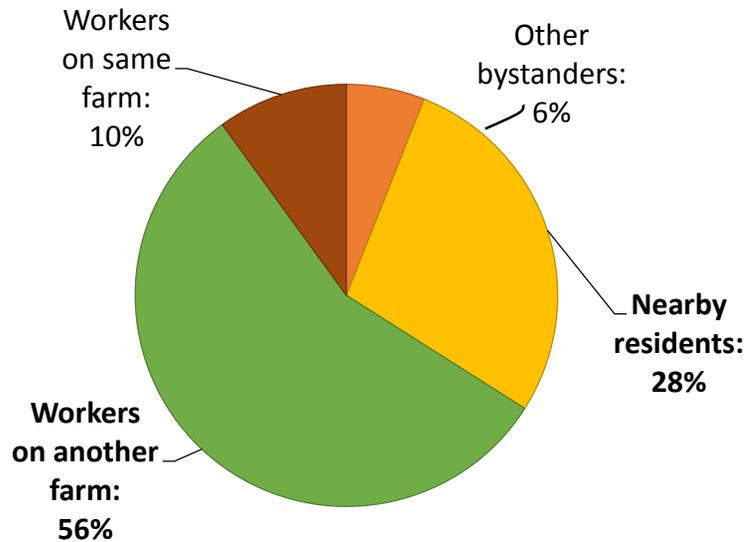
<sup>4</sup> Pesticide Data Report Washington State, Agency Data 2010-2011. Available at <http://ow.ly/WQdax>.

<sup>5</sup> Washington State Pesticide Data Report – 2010, Agency Data 2009. Available at <http://1.usa.gov/1JXTSwT>.

Under current law growers must follow directions on pesticide labels, many of which warn users, “do not apply this product in a way that will contact workers or other persons, either directly or through drift.” **But even the best of intentions are nothing without the right tools to bring them into fruition.** The law also requires employers and certified or licensed pesticide applicators to keep records of basic information regarding pesticide applications.<sup>6</sup> However, **there is currently no way to make that information readily available to those who need it most; neighbors.**

### Who is impacted?

In September, EPA updated its Worker Protection Standards to reduce pesticide exposure while workers are on the job. But while these protections are very important, they will not help those most often exposed to pesticide drift. Department of Health data (right) shows that the majority of people affected by pesticide drift are workers on a neighboring farm, followed by nearby residents.<sup>7</sup> **We owe it to rural communities to extend protections.**



### Modernize notification systems

Federal and state laws require growers to post signs when they spray. However, mounting evidence show that these **signs are not effective on their own.** In 2015, 10 farmworkers settled a drift claim with Dovex Farms. One of the workers said in a statement, “**Employers need to communicate** with each other before they spray. We hope this settlement will lead to **new notification requirements that protect workers.**”<sup>8</sup>The Good Neighbor Bill would create a notification system in which a grower’s neighbors would receive a text message or robo-call 2-48 hours before he or she applied pesticides. **This would give surrounding community members, including workers on nearby farms, adequate notice to avoid the area.**

### Increase transparency

Growers are already required to record their pesticide use, and this bill would modernize those requirements by creating a **Pesticide Use Reporting system** that would make data easily accessible to the public through a searchable, sortable, web-based database. This will give neighbors the **information necessary to protect themselves from harmful chemicals without burdening growers.**

<sup>6</sup> RCW 49.70.119; RCW 17.21.100.

<sup>7</sup> Washington State Department of Health, “Agricultural Pesticide Drift and Farmworker Health,” Farmworker Advisory Committee Meeting. 10/16/2014.

<sup>8</sup> Mehaffey, K.C. “Dovex settles pesticide drift case for \$180,000.” The Wenatchee World. 11/19/2015. <http://www.wenatcheeworld.com/news/2015/nov/19/dovex-settles-pesticide-drift-case-180000/>.