

## Charting the course of pesticides in Salinas Valley.

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By Zachary Stahl



Researchers mapped a checkerboard of pesticide use around Salinas schools (indicated in blue), ranging from 1-5,000 pounds of pesticides applied (light yellow squares) to 60,001-143,288 pounds (red squares).

It's like a bunch of hazardous grapes stretching from Pajaro to King City, where each cluster represents thousands of pounds of pesticides that douse row crops every year. The colorful GIS maps created by Humboldt State University researchers show the pervasiveness of pesticide use in Salinas Valley.

"Everyone living in that region," says Steven Steinberg, director of the Institute of Spatial Analysis at Humboldt State, "is essentially like farmworkers. Everyone has certain exposures and certain risks."

Steinberg and his wife Sheila, director of community research for the California Center for Rural Policy, are authors of *People, Place and Health: A Sociospatial Perspective of Agricultural Workers and their Environment* and an accompanying atlas of pesticide maps. The California Endowment's Agricultural Worker Health Initiative funded the 2008 study, focusing on pesticide use in Monterey and Tulare counties. "Pesticide drift does not discriminate based on demographics of the communities or schools around which they are used," they concluded.

Steven says Salinas Valley residents aren't exposed to pesticides just from drift, but also from the residue on the clothing of the thousands of farmworkers who carry the chemicals into their homes and public places. Growers aren't required to notify schools near fields when they apply pesticides. "There are really strict regulations for pesticides on school grounds, but as soon as you cross to the other side of the property line there's no required reporting of any kind," he says.

After seeing the pesticide maps, Tulare County parents rallied and won a quarter-mile buffer zone between fields and schools, but Monterey County hasn't yet followed suit.

The study found that 593 acres of ag land fall within a quarter-mile of Salinas schools. In Greenfield, 238 acres are within a quarter-mile of schools.

County growers aren't allowed to spray pesticides within 500 feet of a school while children are present – a much smaller gap than the 1,320-foot buffer in Tulare County. Bob Roach, assistant agricultural commissioner says although there's no notification requirement, the ag commissioner works with schools concerned about spraying. The Agricultural Commissioner also investigates any reported pesticide-related illnesses. Last year, the

commissioner's office received 41 exposure complaints, 20 involving agricultural pesticides, including two September incidents in south county, where 13 fieldworkers were hospitalized after exposure. But for long-term, everyday exposure, it's harder to pinpoint harmful health effects as they build up over time, Sheila says.

The Steinbergs worked with Poder Popular of Monterey County to interview community members and disseminate the information. Director Ted Rico says Poder Popular has used the data in educational forums about pesticides. "Our interest is making sure people have information that's useful for them so they can better protect themselves," he says.

The maps are broken into state Legislature, county supervisor and city council districts so the community can present the info to policymakers. "You can't affect any kind of policy change if you don't have data," Rico says.

The Steinbergs hope others use their research for further analysis with current figures (their study relies on 2005 pesticide numbers) and a closer look at measuring pesticide drift and medical data.

**To see Monterey County pesticide maps, visit [www.peopleplaceandhealth.org](http://www.peopleplaceandhealth.org).**

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