Perceptions of risk associated with living near the Koppers Superfund Site, Gainesville, Florida

Authors: Julia "Ky" Gress, Graduate Student, Soil and Water Science, University of Florida

Dr. Mihai G. Giurcano, IFAS Statistics, University of Florida

Background: EPA-mandated soil sampling of Stephen Foster neighborhood yards began in January, 2009. This testing revealed widespread contamination from dioxin related to Koppers' use of the pesticide pentachlorophenol. The majority of the more than 3,000 residents living within .5 mile of the Superfund site knew that the EPA and Florida Department of Health were evaluating the extent of the contamination and possible health effects. This survey of 95 residents living within .5 mile of the site was conducted during a brief window of time between intensified media coverage of the contamination and the release of a long-awaited EPA document outlining the problem and revealing EPA's recommendations for clean-up of these residential properties.

The primary research questions:

1. How knowledgeable do residents feel about the chemicals at Koppers?
2. How concerned are they that the chemicals might be in their yards?
3. Are they worried about a health risk from these chemicals?
4. Are residents using their yards in ways that could increase their contact with dioxin in the soil?

Respondents were classified as living within one of three "zones", which were defined by distance from the site. Survey results were analyzed to determine what factors contribute to residents' knowledge about and level of concern related to perceived risks from the dioxin found in neighboring yards. This information is being used to develop an environmental health education project funded by the USEPA, with the goal of reducing residents' exposure to potentially harmful chemicals in the environment.