

TOOLBOX TALK

What is Penta?

Penta, short for pentachlorophenol, is a manufactured chemical and a restricted-use pesticide. It is used as a wood preservative for utility poles, railroad ties, and wharf pilings. The last legal remaining use of penta is as a wood preservative in utility poles.

There are approximately 135 million chemically treated wood utility poles in the United States. Of these poles, 3 percent are replaced annually; however, each year approximately 4 million utility poles are treated with wood preservatives. As a utility, how do you dispose of your replaced poles?

Wood preservatives are ranked among the most potent cancer agents. They are also promoters of birth defects, reproductive problems, and nervous system toxicants. Exposure to pentachlorophenol can also cause liver problems and damage to the immune system. Studies in workers show that exposure to high levels of pentachlorophenol can cause the cells in the body to produce excess heat. When this occurs, a person may experience a very high fever, profuse sweating, and difficulty breathing. The body temperature can increase to dangerous levels, causing injury to various organs and tissues, and even death. Pentachlorophenol is readily absorbed through skin, can be inhaled through contaminated sawdust, and may be ingested by eating or drinking with chemical on hands.

You may have old containers of pesticides in your attic, basement, or garage that contain pentachlorophenol. Removing these old containers will reduce your family's risk of exposure to pentachlorophenol. You should dispose of these old containers in an appropriate manner through your county's hazardous waste facility. Otherwise, place them out of reach of young children to prevent accidental exposures. You should never store pesticides or household chemicals in containers that children would find attractive to eat or drink from, such as soda bottles.

If you live near a utility pole or railroad tracks, you should prevent your children from playing, climbing, or sitting on them especially in the hot summer months. Don't use discarded utility poles or railroad ties in bonfires. The chemicals used to treat the wood will become airborne and may be inhaled.

Resources: Center for Disease Controls, NIOSH Pocket Guide for Chemical Hazards, PermaPost, SDS for pentachlorophenol, www.beyondpesticides.org, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's Toxicological Profile for Pentachlorophenol



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