



STREET PESTICIDE USE IN SOUTH AFRICA: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY IN REDUCING HEALTH RISKS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poor urban townships in South Africa are plagued with **pest infestations** (e.g. rodents, cockroaches, bed bugs, flies, fleas, mosquitoes, ticks and ants). Inexpensive, highly hazardous "**street pesticides**" (SP) are first choice for pest control by residents. These products however, are **too acutely toxic for household use**. SP can cause short-term health problems, such as accidental **poisonings in children and adults**; can be used for **self-harm** (suicides); cause **long-term health problems**, such as cancer, respiratory effects, infertility, birth defects and behavioural changes (Attention Deficiency Disorder); and could lead to conditions like Parkinson's Disease. Yet, selling these products is **highly profitable for informal vendors**. Demand is high as *street pesticides* are cheap, accessible and "effective". However, the illegal trade in SPs is leading to severe **poisonings and deaths in children and adults**, as well as government **stock piles** of highly toxic pesticides from raids of vendors' goods. To address these problems, there are **several role players** that need to collectively engage with one another (Fig 2). Each needs to implement strategies simultaneously if sustainable change is to occur. The development and promotion of non-chemical, low toxic alternatives of pest control that are economically viable and effective are vital to reduce the use and sale of SP.

Why are Street Pesticides an Issue?

Street pesticides sold by informal vendors are either (Fig 1 & 3):

- 1 – pesticides registered for agricultural use and too toxic for home use, decanted into common beverage containers.
- 2 – unregistered illegal products in packaging that may be confused with known products and often imported illegally.

Figure 1: Illegal/unlabelled street pesticides (with onlooking child)



**In case of poisoning call the 24/7 Poisons
Information Helpline 0861 555 777**

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

❖ Low Socio-Economic Status

- Pest infestation high in townships due to poor sanitation, overcrowding, low quality houses, litter, and poor refuse collection.
- Demand for cheap/effective control
- High unemployment



❖ Poisonings & Deaths

- SP too toxic for home use
- Poisonings occurring
- Under 5 deaths
- Used for self-harm (suicide)
- Long-term health effects
- Occupational health risks for vendors

❖ Under Reporting

- Although pesticide poisoning is a notifiable **medical condition**, it is underreported by health workers (especially doctors)
- District and provincial data not reaching National Dept of Health

❖ Poor Implementation of Legislation

- Easy access
- Ineffective raids of vendors
- Stockpiles of unlabeled & highly hazardous pesticides after local authority raids of vendors

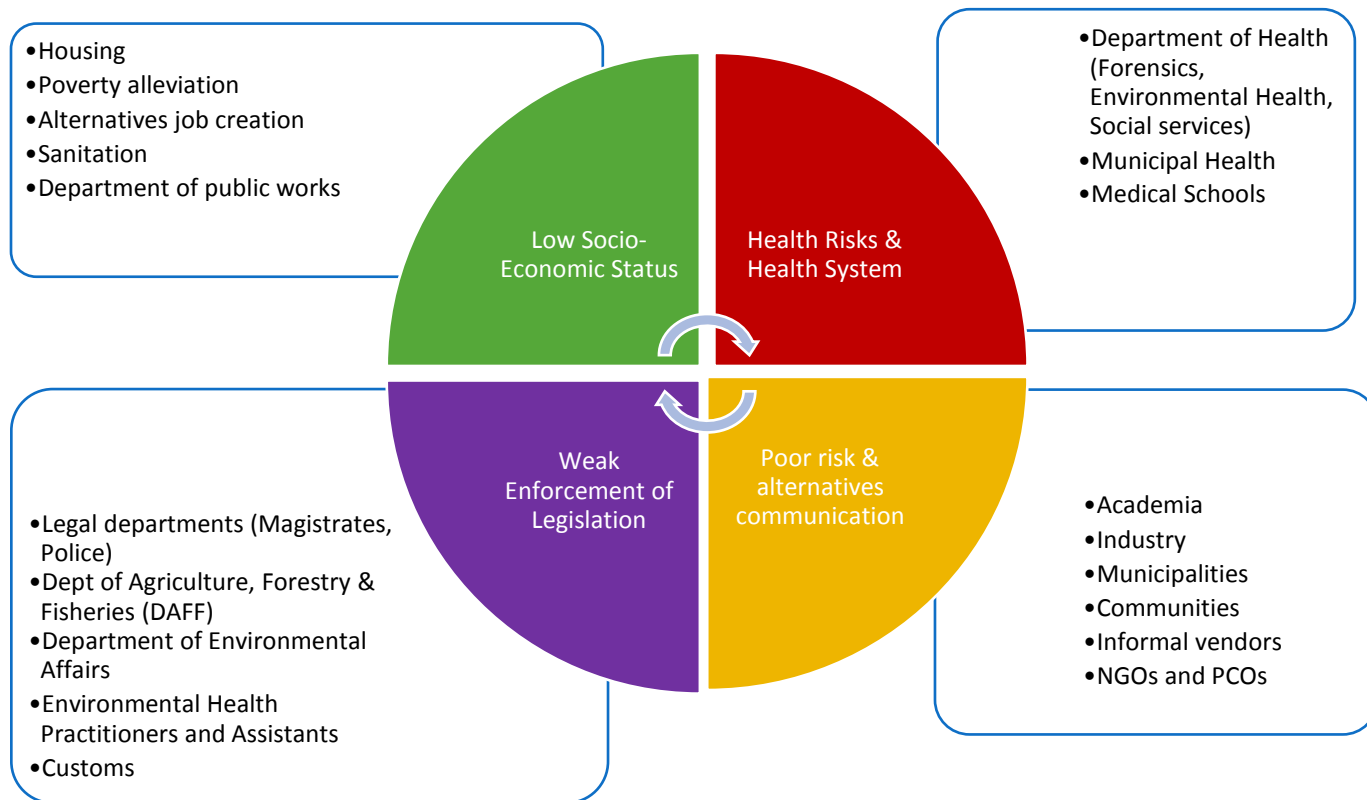
❖ Lack of Risk Information

- Communities unaware of health risks
- Pesticides unlabeled
- Not all residents are controlling for pests

❖ Lack of Pest Control Alternatives

- Residents unaware of low toxic pest control
- Vendors unaware of low toxic products

Figure 2: Stakeholders Needed to Reduce the Risks from Street Pesticides



Recommendations to Reduce Use and Sale of Street Pesticides

As the problem of SP use is of national importance, there needs to be national commitment from and engagement with stakeholders (Fig 2), at all levels of government. Since the problem is based in three key sectors, i.e. health, agriculture and local government, it is recommended that each municipality in South Africa establish a multi-stakeholder Urban Pest Management committee. The committee would first need to understand the extent of the SP problem (the University of Cape Town can provide background), and thereafter identify workable solutions requiring simultaneous and sustainable implementation.

Figure 3: Street pesticides sold by vendors



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