

Pesticides Linked with Prostate Cancer in Farmers

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WASHINGTON - Farmers who use certain pesticides seem to have a higher-than-average risk of prostate cancer, U.S. government researchers said on Thursday.

The researchers, who published their study in the American Journal of Epidemiology, confirmed other findings that show farmers have an unusually high risk of prostate cancer.

"Associations between pesticide use and prostate cancer risk among the farm population have been seen in previous studies; farming is the most consistent occupational risk factor for prostate cancer," Michael Alavanja of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), who helped lead the study, said in a statement.

Researchers at NCI and at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the Environmental Protection Agency studied 55,332 farmers and nursery workers who worked with pesticides.

Between 1993 and 1999, 566 new prostate cancers developed among the men, compared to 495 that would normally be expected in Iowa and North Carolina, the two states studied.

The risk of developing prostate cancer was 14 percent greater for the pesticide applicators compared to the general population.

One pesticide, methyl bromide, increased the risk of prostate cancer in all men.

Six others raised the risk in men with a family history of prostate cancer. They are chlorpyrifos, coumaphos, fonofos, phorate, permethrin and butylate.

More than 220,000 U.S. men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer this year, according to the American Cancer Society, and 30,000 will die of it.

The biggest risk factors for prostate cancer are age and family history. African-American men have higher rates of prostate cancer, and some evidence suggests that men who eat lots of red meat and animal fat have a higher risk.