



SUMMER SAFETY

Is Your Backyard Toxic?

Hidden chemicals make the great outdoors a little less great. Here, three surprising danger zones—and natural fixes.

BY NATALIE GINGERICH MACKENZIE

In the early 1990s, Paul Tukey, now 51, was a successful professional landscaper. But by the spring of 1993, he noticed alarming

symptoms, like eye twitches and bad headaches, then nausea, nosebleeds, and diarrhea. When his doctor asked him to bring in the labels for the

chemicals he used at work, he learned that all the symptoms were known side effects of the products.

Most of us assume that if a product is on the market, it must be safe.

But of the most common of the 80,000 chemicals used today in the United States, only 7 percent have been fully tested for safety.

Many are found in everyday products we use to maintain yards and gardens, so knowing where they lurk can help ensure your outdoor space is a healthier place for your family.

1 SHINY BLACK DRIVEWAY

The sticky black coal tar sealants that give driveways their well-manicured look may contain carcinogenic chemicals called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), a growing number of

studies suggest. PAH concentrations in these sealants are hundreds of times higher than those in other sources, such as exhaust smoke. A Baylor

University study found that house dust in apartment buildings next to coal tar-sealed parking lots contains 25 times as many PAHs as dust in

buildings next to unsealed asphalt lots. Since this is a new area of research, scientists can't say for sure that exposure to driveways containing PAHs causes cancer in people, but they suspect a strong link.

What you can do Coal tar sealants have been banned in a handful of cities and counties, but no matter where you live, avoid coal tar varieties and stick with natural pavement or an asphalt-based sealant. The farther your home is from a source of coal tar sealants, >>

173

million pounds
of pesticides are
applied in
neighborhoods
each year.

the fewer chemicals will creep in from outside. If you already sealed your driveway this season, keep off it as much as possible, especially for the first two weeks after sealing, after which the PAH concentration decreases dramatically. Avoid tracking chemicals into your home by removing your shoes at the door and regularly vacuuming.

2 GREEN WEED-FREE LAWN Ingredients in popular pesticides have been linked to cancer, hormonal changes, and liver or kidney toxicity. Now research points to another surprising peril: mental health hazards. Numerous studies have found that farmers who work with pesticides have as much as six times the risk of depression; even farmers' wives who use sprays in their homes and backyard gardens



have nearly double the risk. **What you can do** Use an all-natural herbicide like corn gluten meal to keep weeds at bay. Apply it in early spring (when forsythia or dogwood first blooms) to prevent annual weeds from reseeding; it also fertilizes your existing grass with nitrogen, so it is healthier (and can crowd out weeds). To help your lawn grow a stronger root system and better withstand weeds, skip daily watering. Instead, irrigate grass deeply once a week or once every few days,