

More Restrictions on Flea/Tick Products Considered

EPA urges pet owners to carefully follow label directions, monitor animals.

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported Thursday that it is intensifying its evaluation of whether further restrictions on the use of spot-on pesticide products for flea and tick control products are necessary to better protect pets. The increased scrutiny applies to over-the-counter and veterinary-channel flea and tick products for pets.

EPA said the move is in response to recent increases in the number of reported incidents. More than 44,000 potential incidents associated with registered spot-on products were reported to EPA in 2008.

Federal law requires EPA registrants to submit reports of possible adverse reactions that may be related to the use of their products, whether or not the products were used properly and according to label instructions. A report also does not indicate a cause-and-effect relationship between product and symptoms.

Although incidents with flea and tick products can involve the use of spot-on treatments, sprays, collars and shampoos, the majority of the incidents reported to EPA are related to flea and tick treatments with EPA-registered spot-on products. Spot-on products are generally sold in tubes or vials and are applied to one or more localized areas on the body of the pet, such as between the shoulders or in a stripe along the back.

Adverse reactions reported from the spot-on products range from skin irritation to seizures and in some cases death, according to EPA.

While noting that the use of flea and tick products can help protect the health of both the pet and the owner's family and that many people use these products without harm to their pets, the EPA recommended that pet owners take precautions when using these products. Specifically, the EPA urged pet owners to carefully follow label directions and to monitor their pets for adverse reactions after application, particularly if using a product for the first time.

The EPA also recommended pet owners consider consulting a veterinarian about "the responsible and effective use of flea and tick products."

The EPA plans to "meet shortly" with spot-on product manufacturers to address the issue. The meeting will be held in conjunction with Health Canada, the Canadian health department, which has identified similar concerns about the use of spot-on flea and tick products.