

SIX COMPLAINTS IN FIVE WEEKS.

Closed with nearly identical findings — almost a year later.

Orange County Agricultural Commissioner case files 2020-0027, 2020-0028, 2020-0031, 2020-0032, 2020-0038 & 2020-0040 — O'Connell Landscape, Ladera Ranch, CA — May 13 to June 17, 2020

6 SEPARATE COMPLAINTS logged in a 5-week span (May 13 – Jun 17, 2020)	0 SITE VISITS to any of the 6 reported spray locations	1 DAY ALL 6 REPORTS FINALIZED April 14, 2021 — ~10–11 months later
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The Six Complaints

MAY 13, 2020 2020-0028 RESIDENT REPORTED “Spraying pesticides with no truck or signs around and nothing to show residents it was happening.” No notification to residents or visitors at the site. COUNTY RESPONSE No violations found — clubhouse posting from a different date range treated as adequate notice	MAY 14, 2020 2020-0027 RESIDENT REPORTED “One guy on the roundabout of Sienna and O'Neil, spraying with no signs and no truck.” No notification to residents or visitors at the site. COUNTY RESPONSE No violations found — same reasoning, no visit to the roundabout
JUNE 1, 2020 2020-0032 RESIDENT REPORTED “O'Connell was spraying chemicals.” no notifications on site to warn residents or visitors — ½ independent reports of this same day's spraying COUNTY RESPONSE No violations found — no site visit to verify either report	JUNE 1, 2020 2020-0031 RESIDENT REPORTED “I saw a man spraying chemicals on the plants right next to the sidewalk where people were walking including myself.” — no notifications on site to warn residents or visitors- 2/2 of the same incident COUNTY RESPONSE No violations found — same boilerplate, filed the same day as 2020-0032
JUNE 10, 2020 2020-0038 RESIDENT REPORTED “Man spraying chemicals without signage and wind blowing in my direction.” — alleged drift COUNTY RESPONSE No violations found — wind/drift never analyzed or measured	JUNE 17, 2020 2020-0040 RESIDENT REPORTED “Worker spraying and no signs visible.” COUNTY RESPONSE No violations found — same reasoning, five weeks after the first complaint, no visit to the site

Six Different Incidents

Are these the same incident? Mostly no — with one exception. Each of the six has its own CASPIR case number and its own anonymous reporter. Five are separate residents reporting five separate spray incidents, over five different weeks. The exception: 2020-0031 and 2020-0032 were filed by two different residents on the same day, June 1, 2020, describing the same spraying event from different vantage points. What makes all six look alike is the county's response: every one was investigated and closed using nearly identical language, evidence, and reasoning — and all six reports were prepared and approved on the exact same day, by the same inspector.

Why This Pattern Is Worrisome

Individually, each report might read as a routine close-out. Lined up together, they show the same office running the same playbook six times in five weeks — and again in a seventh, more serious complaint eight months later.

- **Recycled evidence, not case-specific investigation.** All six reports lean on the same two clubhouse visits — May 11 and June 2, 2020 — regardless of the actual complaint date. Nothing in any of the six files documents what notice, if any, was posted specifically for May 13, May 14, June 1, June 10, or June 17.
- **Two witnesses, one incident, zero follow-up.** 2020-0031 and 2020-0032 were filed by different residents on the same day, June 1, 2020, describing what reads as the same spraying event near a sidewalk. Two independent reports of one incident should have been easier to verify than most — instead both were closed with the identical boilerplate, and neither triggered a site visit.
- **No site visits to any of the six reported locations.** Every investigation happened at the LARMAC clubhouse, 1 Daisy Street — not at the Sienna/O'Neil roundabout, the sidewalk described in 2020-0031, or any of the other reported spray sites. No reporter was interviewed in person, and no photos were taken of any actual application.
- **A wind-drift complaint went unanalyzed.** Case 2020-0038 is the only one of the six that alleges drift — “wind blowing in my direction” — yet the report never addresses wind conditions, measurement, or the label's contact prohibition. The one regulation written for this exact scenario, 3 CCR § 6614, is not cited in any of the six reports.
- **No follow-through after the county's own outreach.** Per the file, Inspector Kathy Kilar emailed at least one reporter on May 27, 2020 citing notice regulations — and “did not receive a response.” No further attempt to reach the resident is documented in any of the six files.
- **All six reports finalized on the identical date.** Every one of these reports — covering six complaints from at least five different residents — is dated “prepared” and “approved” on April 14, 2021, roughly 10 to 11 months after the incidents occurred, and all by the same Senior Agricultural Inspector.
- **The county's own file acknowledges a chronic pattern.** Several of the six reports repeat, nearly word for word: “The Orange County Agricultural Commissioner's office has received complaints regarding pesticide applications from several Ladera Ranch residents for several years to the current 2021 year.” That admission did not trigger a different investigative approach — it was followed by the same boilerplate conclusion each time.

This is the same investigative pattern already documented in the February 2021 sidewalk-spraying case: the same inspector, the same closing language (“do not require signs to be posted”, “no violations of FAC or CCR found”), and the same reliance on the applicator's own paperwork instead of independent, on-site verification. Six complaints in five weeks — plus a seventh, more serious complaint eight months later — is not a single bad report. It's a documented method.

Source: State of California Pesticide Episode Investigation Reports (PR-ENF-127A), Orange County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, case files 2020-0027, 2020-0028, 2020-0031, 2020-0032, 2020-0038 and 2020-0040, obtained via Orange County Public Records request #26-4801. Summarizes information contained in the county's own investigation files; does not allege any violation of law by any individual or entity named.

[View the full public records production \(all 6 case files, PDF\)](#)

Case 2020-0038: the one enforceable violation nobody investigated. Five of the six complaints turn on a question the county says isn't a violation — whether signage was posted. 2020-0038 is different: it reports “wind blowing in my direction,” meaning drift, which 3 CCR § 6614 (cited above) does make enforceable. The investigation never analyzes wind, timing, or contact exposure — it recycles the same two clubhouse visits used for the other five. This was the one complaint where the county had grounds to investigate an actual violation. It didn't.

This is what taxpayers fund the Orange County Agricultural Commissioner's Office to do: investigate reported violations and hold applicators accountable when the law is broken. On the one complaint in this set that described an enforceable violation, that didn't happen. Residents did everything the process asked of them — they reported what they saw, when they saw it, through the state's own CASPIR system. They had a right to know what was being sprayed near their homes and families, in an area it was likely to drift onto them or their loved ones — and to have that report actually investigated. It wasn't. The same failure to investigate recurs in the county's February 2021 investigation into O'Connell spraying on a Ladera Ranch sidewalk.

[View the February 2021 investigation report referenced above](#)

THE COUNTY CHECKED HALF THE RULE.

Title 3, California Code of Regulations § 6618(b) has two separate notice requirements — one to the property operator, one to the people actually on site. The county's five signage closures only ever verified the first.

The rule has two parts. The county only ever checked one. California's Legislature enacted this notice requirement so people could actually protect themselves before they're exposed to pesticides (Food and Agricultural Code § 12980). The regulation that implements that mandate, 3 CCR § 6618(b), splits the duty into two separate requirements:

- ✓ **(b)(1) — Notify the property operator** (the HOA) of the date, the pesticide, and any precautions.
Verified in all six reports.
- ✗ **(b)(2) — Notify the people** actually on the property, or likely to enter it, during the application.
Never checked in any of the six reports.

Every one of the five signage complaints in this set was closed by verifying (b)(1) alone — a monthly posting existed at the clubhouse, so the HOA had been told. None of the five reports ever address (b)(2). Checking half a two-part rule and calling it compliance isn't a loophole. It's a misreading of the county's own regulation.

The exact text of (b)(2): the property operator must “assure that notice is given to all persons who are on the property to be treated, or who may enter during the application or the period of time that any restrictions on entry are in effect.” (3 CCR § 6618(b)(2))

Picture what a missing (b)(2) notice actually looks like on the ground. Ladera Ranch is a sidewalk-and-trail community — kids walking home from school, strollers, dog-walkers, joggers, bikers. The label's drying window runs up to four hours, far longer than the applicator is ever in sight, and for all of it the only notice the county ever checked for was a sheet of paper on a bulletin board somewhere else — never whether it reached anyone about to walk through.

This isn't hypothetical, and it isn't new:

- **March 27, 2019** — spraying photographed at the Sienna/Dorrance crosswalk at 7:45 a.m., “right when all our kids are walking to school.”
- **April 16, 2019** — spraying reported “right outside of the Goddard school... on the other side of their outdoor play area fence...”
- **2020** — residents did what they were told: they filed the six formal CASPIR complaints this report documents. All six closed with the same boilerplate.
- **November 4, 2021** — the pattern continues: a resident's kids and dog would have been out on that grass had she not seen the applicator herself.

None of the six investigations in this report ever asked who was actually outside on any of these days, or whether the drying window had even elapsed before someone was likely to walk past. Somewhere in every one of those four-hour windows, it isn't a question of if but who — a stroller wheel, a dog's paw, a jogger's shoe, a kid's hand — walking straight through it with no idea it was ever there.

The one complaint that didn't depend on this failure went uninvestigated. 2020-0038 described drift, which is covered separately by 3 CCR § 6614 — enforceable whether or not notice was posted. That was the complaint the county could have investigated on the merits. It never analyzed wind conditions, application timing, or contact exposure. It closed 2020-0038 with the same boilerplate used for the other five.

Nothing on record shows this has been fixed. Nothing reviewed for this report indicates the county has changed how it applies 3 CCR § 6618(b)(2) — whether notice actually reaches people on or entering a treated area — or how it handles drift complaints under § 6614. LifeLessToxic.com submitted a follow-up Public Records Act request on September 6, 2026 seeking countywide drift and label-consistency records, specifically to find out. California has reformed pesticide notification elsewhere — a statewide notification system for restricted-material pesticides in production agriculture took effect in February 2025, and new near-school notification rules for agricultural commodity production took effect in January 2026 — but neither applies to general-use landscape herbicides like the one used in Ladera Ranch, and neither changes how a drift complaint gets investigated.

And it isn't hypothetical — we saw it again in the years that followed. Photos posted publicly by Ladera Ranch residents between March and November 2021 show the same unsigned spraying continuing. And the county's own February 2021 investigation into O'Connell spraying directly beside a Ladera Ranch sidewalk was closed with the same language, the same absence of a site visit, and the same reliance on the applicator's own paperwork as all six complaints in this report.

[View the February 2021 investigation report](#)

A THIRD VIOLATION NOBODY EVEN ASKED ABOUT

Every one of these investigations asked exactly one question — was notice posted — and once, whether drift was analyzed. None of them ever asked the question the product's own federally registered label requires: was anyone in the treated area while it was still wet? **Under Food and Agricultural Code § 12973, using a pesticide in a manner inconsistent with its label is independently unlawful. Wind speed doesn't matter. Timing doesn't matter. Whether a notice was posted anywhere doesn't matter.** The Lifeline Herbicide label itself states: “Keep unprotected persons out of treated areas until sprays have dried,” and separately bars application “in a way that will contact workers or other persons, either directly or through drift.” The label puts that drying window at a minimum of thirty minutes and an average of four hours.

The county's own case file admits this happened. The reporter in 2020-0031 stated she saw “a man spraying chemicals on the plants right next to the sidewalk where people were walking including myself.” Photographs taken in 2021 show the same thing: an applicator spraying directly beside an occupied sidewalk, roadway, and bike path — no barrier, no second worker managing pedestrian access, no indication anyone was being kept out of anything. Six investigations, one inspector, one closing date — and not one of them asked whether the label's own re-entry requirement was followed. That isn't a failure of the regulation. It's a failure of the investigation.

This section reflects publicly available information about California and Orange County pesticide regulations and enforcement practices as of September 2026. It does not allege any violation of law by any individual or entity named.

Six complaints in five weeks. One inspector, one closing date, and a two-part rule the county never once fully applied. This report is a call for one thing: an independent, third-party audit of how the Orange County Agricultural Commissioner's Office investigates pesticide complaints — before the next four-hour window goes by unwatched.

[Sign the petition calling for an independent audit](#)

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