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Top Ten Unfounded Health Scores of 2007 #6 Roses Are Toxic



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The (Unfounded) Scare: Valentine's Day flowers shipped into the U.S. from Colombia were doused in an assortment of chemicals including pesticides and fungicides. Colombia is the second largest exporter of flowers in the world, with exports around \$1 billion dollars worth of cut flowers every year. The United States gets 62 percent of all its flowers from Colombia, which gave this topic great scare potential.⁽³⁴⁾

Origin of the Scare: Although flowers are required to be bug-free before entering the U.S., they are not required to be clear of chemical residues as are edible imports such as fruits and vegetables. Because Colombia flower exporters did not have to rid the flowers of chemical residues, there were claims that using pesticides and fungicides was "encouraged."⁽³⁵⁾ These chemicals that can sometime remain on imported flowers have been shown to cause cancer and neurological disorders in high-dose animal experiments.

Media Coverage: Media coverage of toxic flowers came out just in time to scare those eager to exchange flowers for Valentine's Day. An AP release was picked up by major news websites, including USA Today and Fox News. Although the real story was that pesticides on flowers could potentially be hazardous to workers, the media aimed for the hearts of consumers with headlines such as "Valentine's Roses Get Dipped In Chemicals" and "Not-So-Nice: Valentine's Day Highlights Problem of Toxic Chemical-Doused Flowers."

The Bottom Line: There is no evidence showing that exposure to pesticides at trace levels causes any adverse health effects. High doses of the chemicals can pose a threat, and therefore it is important that the safety of workers is made a top priority. However, there is no evidence of low-level exposure to pesticides causing cancer or other health problems. Without these chemicals, the Colombian flowers would be vulnerable to pests and turned away at the border, which would lead to unnecessary economic hardship for those who make their living from the flower business.

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