


Starbucks accused of exposing New York City customers to toxic pesticide

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By Minyvonne Burke

Two lawsuits filed against Starbucks claim that several New York City stores exposed customers to a poisonous — and potentially deadly — pesticide toxin, and then fired a store manager who complained about them.

In one class action suit, filed on Tuesday in state court in Manhattan, 10 Starbucks customers claim that they were "exposed to the toxic chemical" Dichlorvos, or DDVP, after making purchases in multiple city stores over the last three years.

DDVP is an ingredient that is emitted into the air by a pesticide called Hot Shot No-Pest Strips, which are produced by Spectrum Brand Holdings.

The lawsuit states that Starbucks uses the strips in its Manhattan stores to keep cockroaches and other pests away. The strips, which can be purchased in many home and garden stores as well as online, kill insects but are also harmful to human beings, according to the lawsuit.

Spectrum Brand Holdings did not immediately return NBC News' request for comment.

Photos accompanying the lawsuit show the strips next to bagels and food preparation equipment and near air vents.

"Starbucks stores throughout Manhattan have for many years been permeated with a toxic pesticide called Dichlorvos, which is highly poisonous and completely unfit for use in proximity to food, beverages and people," the suit says.

The lawsuit states that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention says pesticides containing DDVP should only be used in enclosed spaces where people are either not present or are given a respirator or other breathing apparatus.

According to the Hot Shot [website](#), the strips should not be used "in kitchens, restaurants or areas where food is prepared or served."

Exposure to DDVP can result in symptoms which include loss of bladder control, muscle tremors and weakness, trouble breathing, nausea and paralysis, the lawsuit states. Severe exposure can result in coma and death.

"On numerous occasions over the last several years, Starbucks' employees and third-party exterminators have informed regional and district management – both verbally and in writing – about the improper and dangerous use of No-Pest Strips throughout stores in Manhattan," according to the lawsuit.

"Needless to say, Starbucks has closely held this information and has not disclosed to the public that DDVP has poisoned the environment in its stores."

The suit alleges that the customers, who are from New York, South Carolina and California, experienced emotional distress and anxiety "that they would develop serious health issues." They are seeking an unspecified amount of damages.

In the second suit, also filed Tuesday in Manhattan's federal court, a former Starbucks employee claims he was abruptly fired in February 2018 after complaining about the misuse of the pesticide strips.

A pest control technician who worked at multiple Manhattan Starbucks locations, and his supervisor, also allege that from 2016 to 2018 they made several complaints about the strips. In June 2018, Starbucks terminated its contract with the pest control company to silence the technician's "repeated reports and complaints about the foregoing risks to health and safety," according to the suit.

The former employee, technician and supervisor are seeking unspecified damages.

A spokesperson for Starbucks said Tuesday that the pesticide strips were being used in violation of its policy and once it was made aware of the complaints, the company stopped using them. The spokesperson also said they hired an outside expert who determined that Starbucks' customers and employees were not put at risk.