

Manhattan Starbucks used pesticides near its kitchens, suit alleges

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Workers at Starbucks stores throughout Manhattan used a dangerous pesticide that isn't supposed to be anywhere near kitchens, a new lawsuit charges.

In a suit filed Tuesday in Manhattan Supreme Court, a group of Starbucks customers allege that filthy conditions in the company's Manhattan-area locations — of which there are more than 100 — have allowed pests to flourish.

Yet rather than safely taking care of the unsanitary conditions, Starbucks employees used a pesticide sold under the brand name Hot Shot No-Pest strips, which contains Dichlorvos, or DDVP, that can cause adverse effects in humans that range from nausea and diarrhea to paralysis and even death, the suit says.

"Rather than addressing the underlying circumstances that are the root cause of these infestations, Starbucks has recklessly permitted and allowed its employees to use a toxic pesticide in its stores to attempt to rid the locations of these problems," court papers state.

The label for No-Pest Strips cautions not to use the product near food preparation areas, and the federal Centers for Disease Control has warned that exposure to DDVP can affect nerves and muscles.

Starbucks said Tuesday that DDVP has been removed from all of the company's locations and that its stores are safe.

A spokesman, Reggie Borges, added that the complaint "lacks merit" and that it's just an attempt to cause fear among Starbucks customers.

"It's really an attempt to incite public fear for their own financial gain," Borges said. "We go to great lengths to ensure the safety of our partners and our customers."

But David Gottlieb of the law firm Wigdor LLP, who represents the plaintiffs in the consumer class-action suit, said that even if all Starbucks stores in Manhattan have been cleansed of the pesticide, the company still ignored warnings about it as recently as last year.

In a related suit filed in Manhattan federal court Tuesday, two exterminators who provided services to Manhattan-area Starbucks stores and a former Starbucks store manager say they gave the company's brass multiple written and oral warnings from 2016 and into 2018.

But they say that, instead of heeding the warnings, the manager was fired in retaliation for blowing the whistle on pesticide use and that Starbucks ended its relationship with the exterminators, the suits says.

Borges denied that the company would retaliate against its employees.