FOLKETINGET
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RIGSREVISIONEN

September 2026
– 23/2025

Extract from Rigsrevisionen's report
submitted to the Public Accounts Committee

Inspections of pesticide use

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose and conclusion

1. This report concerns inspections of pesticide use.

Pesticides have been used for decades to protect plants against weeds, pests and diseases. By using pesticides, businesses, such as farmers and horticultural growers, can achieve higher and more stable crop yields.

When pesticides are sprayed on plants, pesticide residues may leach through the soil into groundwater or remain on food. Pesticide use can therefore have adverse effects on the environment and human health. Since the first pesticide strategy in 1986, the aim has been to limit pesticide use as much as possible. However, despite decades of efforts, pesticide levels in drinking water boreholes have been rising since 2018. The latest measurements, from June 2025, detected pesticide residues in more than half of drinking water boreholes. According to water supply companies, groundwater containing pesticide residues therefore has to be diluted in an increasing number of locations before it can be supplied as drinking water.

A political agreement on the pesticide strategy 2022–2026 was reached in February 2022, allocating additional funding to strengthen inspections and reduce the number of infringements. The parties to the agreement reached a supplementary agreement in April 2025, which, among other things, requires the Danish Environmental Protection Agency, which is responsible for inspections, to make greater use of businesses' pesticide use reports when selecting businesses for inspection.

2. The purpose of the study is to assess whether the Ministry of Environment's inspections of pesticide use are satisfactory. We answer the following questions in the report:

- Does the Danish Environmental Protection Agency have an adequate basis for its inspections?
- Is the Danish Environmental Protection Agency's risk-based selection of businesses for inspection adequate?
- Does the Danish Environmental Protection Agency carry out effective inspections of pesticide use?

Pesticides in Denmark
There are more than 400 approved pesticides in Denmark.

Pesticide use falls into four categories:

- Herbicides: 49%
- Fungicides: 35%
- Insecticides: 9%
- Plant growth regulators: 7%.

Source: Pesticide statistics 2024.

The first pesticide strategy
In December 1986, the then Minister for the Environment published a plan to reduce pesticide use. The aim was to protect the environment and safeguard human health.

Political agreement on the pesticide strategy 2022–2026
The agreement was reached by the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Danish People's Party, the Green Left, the Social Liberal Party, the Red-Green Alliance, the Conservative People's Party, the New Right, the Liberal Alliance and the Christian Democrats.

The Danish Agency for Green Transition and Aquatic Environment, under the Ministry of Nature and Animal Welfare, carries out on-site inspections on behalf of the Danish Environmental Protection Agency.

Rigsrevisionen has monitored this area since publishing its report on protection of groundwater from pesticides in 2019 (report no. 7/2019). Rigsrevisionen initiated this study in January 2026.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Environment's inspections of pesticide use are highly unsatisfactory. The inspections have only limited capacity to detect infringements, and in a number of cases there are no consequences when businesses report infringements of their own accord. The Danish Environmental Protection Agency's selection of businesses for inspection is insufficiently risk-based. There is therefore a risk that excessive pesticide use or the use of illegal pesticides will go undetected and unsanctioned. As a consequence, illegal pesticides or excessive quantities of approved pesticides may leach into groundwater or end up in food.

The Danish Environmental Protection Agency's basis for inspections is inadequate

The Agency has an overview of the vast majority of businesses subject to inspection, but its information on which pesticides businesses have used is based solely on self-reporting. Businesses can amend, delete or omit this information altogether, and the Agency has not verified its accuracy. The Agency therefore has no assurance that the information presents a true and fair view.

The Agency has known since 2018 that not all pesticide use is reported as required. We have established that, since 2011, pesticide dealers have purchased 7,800 tonnes of the pesticide glyphosate that businesses have not reported as used. The Agency has not examined what has happened to these surplus quantities of herbicides. Nor has it examined whether other pesticides are being incorrectly reported.

The Danish Environmental Protection Agency does not sufficiently base its selection of businesses for inspection on the risk of infringements

The Agency has established a number of criteria that provide a sound basis for selecting sectors, such as potato growers and fruit growers, for inspection. However, its selection of businesses within these sectors does not sufficiently reflect the risk that an individual business has infringed the rules. For example, the Agency has made only limited use of businesses' reports of illegal use in its risk assessments.

The Danish Environmental Protection Agency's inspections of pesticide use are ineffective

On-site inspections are carried out in a way that makes it very difficult for the Agency to establish whether the rules on pesticide use have been infringed. During inspection visits, the Agency has little other than businesses' own spray records to rely on. An inspector may find half-empty containers of illegal pesticides in storage, but unless the business has recorded their use in its spray records, inspectors cannot establish that the pesticides have been used.

Furthermore, until spring 2025, the Agency did not carry out checks on self-reported infringements. Businesses therefore faced no consequences if they infringed the rules and reported this themselves to the Danish Environmental Protection Agency. The Agency's practice before 2025 was in breach of the Chemicals Act. The Ministry has stated that it only became aware of this in spring 2025. Rigsrevisionen finds it problematic that the Agency remained passive and was insufficiently familiar with the legislation it was responsible for administering.

As early as 2019, Rigsrevisionen criticised the Danish Environmental Protection Agency for not using infringements already reported to it in its inspections. Furthermore, in both 2021 and 2025, the Danish Agency for Green Transition and Aquatic Environment, which carries out on-site inspections, raised concerns with the Ministry of Environment about the limited scope for detecting infringements. The Danish Environmental Protection Agency has not addressed the specific proposal put forward by the Danish Agency for Green Transition and Aquatic Environment.