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EPA warns private prison company about pesticide misuse at Tacoma ICE facility

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has issued a warning to the private prison company that runs the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Tacoma. The EPA says the Florida-based company, GEO Group, exposes detainees at the facility to pesticides multiple times a day without the opportunity to change into clean clothes. Some detainees have complained of headaches and other illnesses they believe the chemicals have caused. The ICE detention center in Tacoma, where more than 1,500 can be placed while they wait for their immigration cases to proceed, has also recently experienced a COVID outbreak, with dozens of detainees testing positive. This isn't the first time GEO Group has failed to follow EPA rules. Earlier this year, the EPA reported that California detainees at a GEO Group-run facility were experiencing nosebleeds, burning eyes and other ailments because of pesticide misuse. In an email, GEO Group said it has been safely using cleaning and disinfectant products for several years and that it intends to address the agency. Washington state has also sued GEO Group alleging its failure to pay the state minimum wage to detainees who cook and clean in the Tacoma facility. The state's attorney general expects that trial to start in October.