

Washington State Air Monitoring Reveals Pesticide in the Air Above “Levels of Concern”

Same Pesticide Sickened Children and Adults Near Pasco in October But DOH Pesticide Program Faces Massive Cuts, and New Federal Rule is Under Attack

FARM WORKER PESTICIDE PROJECT
PROYECTO DE CAMPESINOS Y PESTICIDAS

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Download the report at: www.fwpp.org

The Farm Worker Pesticide Project (FWPP) released a report today on the results of state testing for the fumigant MITC in the air. The report discusses the first year of data collected by Washington State University (WSU) under a state Department of Health (DOH) pilot drift monitoring program. It also discusses data from other WSU studies, and describes an October 2008 MITC poisoning incident near Pasco, involving an infant, other young children, and teens.

Key findings in the report include:

- Nearly constant drift. MITC was found in 94% of all test samples over 4 years of studies during the fall fumigation season.
- Numerous exceedances of “acute Levels of Concern (LOC)”. (EPA benchmark for exposures less than 24 hours long. Exceedances indicate health effects might occur.)
- Numerous exceedances of “subchronic Levels of Concern”, (EPA and California health agency benchmarks for exposures 24 hours to 30 days long.)
- Substantial reason to doubt safety of exposures to MITC in concentrations below the Levels of Concern.

“People have a right to not be exposed to pesticides. That right is constantly violated during the fumigation season. It is particularly troublesome that children and adults are inhaling pesticides in concentrations above health agencies’ levels of concern,” said FWPP staffperson Carol Dansereau.

FWPP released the report because of imminent decisions in Washington State and in Washington DC that will affect public protection against fumigants and other pesticides:

- Massive funding cuts are proposed for the Washington State Department of Health pesticide program and the Washington Poison Center. The state Pesticide Incident Reporting and Tracking (PIRT) Panel may be eliminated.
- EPA is under pressure from pesticide users and manufacturers to weaken its new rule for MITC and other fumigants, including provisions requiring buffer zones around fumigation fields. Farm worker and community groups argue that

the buffer zones are not adequately protective and that the rule needs to be strengthened, including by establishing phase-out deadlines.

- The Washington State Department of Agriculture has objected to the new fumigant rule and has told EPA that it may not be able to fully enforce the rule.

“State programs to protect people from pesticides must be bolstered, not cut,” said Dansereau. “State legislators and the Governor must reinstate DOH funding to protect people from pesticides.”

“EPA needs to strengthen and enforce the new fumigant rule, and establish a timeline for switching to safe alternatives,” Dansereau said. “The Governor needs to direct WSDA to support and enforce the new rule.”

“Alternatives to highly toxic fumigants exist, and growers deserve support in transitioning to these. Workers, growers and community members deserve clean air,” Dansereau said.

Health effects associated with MITC exposures include: nausea, headaches, difficulty breathing, anxiety, eye and respiratory irritation, and other problems. EPA has asked manufacturers to do tests on less immediate health effects like cancer, but is allowing exposures despite not having that information. “The air sampling results drive home the sad fact that children and adults in Eastern Washington are guinea pigs in an uncontrolled experiment involving ongoing exposures to pesticides against their wills,” Dansereau said.

The report can be downloaded at www.fwpp.org. Spanish version available at that site.

Background MITC is the breakdown product of metam sodium, the key ingredient in fumigant products such as Vapam and Sectagon. It is used to kill nematodes, plant pathogens, and weeds in soils before crops are planted. Over 15 million pounds and 10 million pounds were applied to potato fields alone in Washington State in 2003 and 2005 respectively. About 51 to 55 million pounds are applied to crops annually in the U.S.

Farm Worker Pesticide Project is a Washington State non-profit organization directed by farm worker community members and allies. FWPP helped community members engage in air monitoring in 2006, and worked with allies to successfully persuade the state legislature to launch the DOH pilot air monitoring program in 2007.