

PRESS RELEASE

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Media Contacts:

- Robert Lieber, R.N., Mayor of Albany, 510-703-1876
- Dr. Jeff Haferman, Ph.D., member of the Monterey City Council, 831-277-8965
- Mike Lynberg, citizen who collected LBAM spray illness complaints, 831-238-2084

State Asked to Rescind Report on Spraying Illnesses

July 31, 2008

A group of 18 mayors and other elected officials today requested that the directors of three state agencies retract a report on 643 illness complaints filed after last fall's aerial pesticide spraying for the light brown apple moth (LBAM).

The letter notes that the state's report, which concluded that it was not possible to determine whether there was a link between the spray and the illnesses, was flawed because it was based on incorrect information, provided by the pesticide manufacturer, about the size of the microparticles in the spray.

The letter, signed by more than a dozen mayors and city council members from the East Bay, Marin, and the Central Coast, also requests that Governor Schwarzenegger, State Food and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura, and other state officials stop saying publicly that there is "no link" between the spraying and the illnesses even though that was not the report's conclusion.

"The state's report was always inconclusive, and now we know it was also deeply flawed," said Albany Mayor Robert Lieber, who is a registered nurse.

A review of last fall's spray ingredients was published earlier this year by two independent scientists, Jeff Haferman, Ph.D. and Dennis Knepp, Ph.D. Haferman and Knepp established that about half of the spray's plastic microparticles were 10 microns or smaller in diameter, which poses a serious health risk.

The state's illness report had based its analysis on information from the pesticide manufacturer stating that the microparticle size was 20-25 microns. The microparticles were the time-released delivery mechanism for the pesticide, which was made up of synthetic moth pheromones and a number of other ingredients.

According to the American Lung Association, breathing particulate matter that is 10 microns or smaller in size can reach a person's deep lung tissue and cause a variety of illnesses, including asthma.

The letter was sent to Joan Denton, director of the Office of Health Hazard Assessment; Mary-Ann Warmerdam, director of the Department of Pesticide Regulation; and Mark Horton, director of the Department of Public Health, whose agencies wrote the state report on the illness complaints. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and several state and federal elected officials were also sent copies of the letter.

“The state has taken the first step in the right direction by halting aerial spraying over urban areas. Now it is time for them to accurately analyze the hundreds of illnesses that occurred late last year,” said Lieber. “This is particularly important because the state still plans to spray forested and agricultural areas; given the number of illness reports received last year, we cannot proceed with any further LBAM spray until a full, valid study of those illnesses has been done.”

Haferman said, “There is a strong link in the scientific literature between microparticles that are 10 microns and smaller and illnesses like those people suffered late last year on the Central Coast. I think the Governor should take the high road and insist that a more thorough, accurate and peer reviewed study of the illnesses be completed before any further eradication measures take place.”

The state report analyzed fewer than 10 percent of the 643 illness complaints, and none of the individuals or physicians who reported illnesses were contacted as part of the investigation.

Mike Lynberg, a Monterey Peninsula resident who collected many of the health complaints after the state failed to put any formal structure in place for collecting them, notes, “Even though at least one child nearly died of respiratory failure following the aerial spraying and several other people were hospitalized, the state still has not interviewed a single person who got sick or any of the 74 doctors who filed pesticide illness reports on their behalf. We should expect much more of state agencies responsible for protecting the public’s health.”

Although the State Department of Food and Agriculture says that highly populated areas will no longer be aeri ally sprayed for LBAM, public interest groups fear that the spraying of forested and rural areas will drift and that the spraying also will affect people who live in these isolated areas or who are there for recreation.

“The state has not said where the ‘forested’ areas are that it plans to spray. Do they include Mt. Tamalpais in the middle of Marin County, or Golden Gate Park? It’s also possible that the state will use aerial spraying for other insect species in the future. This is another reason we believe it is important to have an accurate investigation and record of the past spraying-related illnesses,” said Lieber.

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