

ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 1530 (LIEBER)

Preventing Pesticide Poisoning

BACKGROUND

California's current cholinesterase medical supervision program, established in 1974, was developed to prevent pesticide poisoning among pesticide handlers. Farmworkers who load, mix, or apply certain neurotoxic pesticides – organophosphates or carbamates – must be tested before exposure and periodically to ensure that their health is not endangered.

Organophosphate and carbamate pesticides work by inhibiting a nerve enzyme called cholinesterase (ChE), which is essential for normal nerve function. Overexposure and poisoning can be fatal. While the use of cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticides has lessened over the years, approximately 7.8 million pounds were applied in California in 2003 and 2004. In 2005, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation reported 74 occupational poisoning cases related to this group of pesticides.

Each organophosphate and carbamate handler's ChE levels are monitored for potentially dangerous decreases under the current medical supervision program. If such a decrease is found, the work practices must be reviewed and the worker may be removed from the work environment. The results of these ChE tests must be kept on file by the pesticide handler's employer for three years.

PROBLEM

Unfortunately, when the California cholinesterase medical supervision program was established, it did not include any requirement for transmitting results to state agencies because the only option was transmittal by mail. As a result, the public has no information on whether or not the program is working to protect pesticide handlers from overexposure to a widely used group of neurotoxic pesticides.

BILL SUMMARY

This bill would require a laboratory that performs cholinesterase testing within the cholinesterase medical supervision program, or for medical evaluation of suspected pesticide poisoning, to electronically report specified information to the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, which would pass on this information to the appropriate state and county health agencies on an as-needed basis. OEHHA would also publish an annual report evaluating the medical supervision program.

Electronic reporting will allow authorities to better protect the California farmworkers who are routinely exposed to potentially dangerous levels of organophosphate and carbamate pesticides.

STATUS

- Introduced 2/23/2007
- Assembly Health Committee Hearing 4/10/07
- Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee Hearing 4/24/07
- Assembly Appropriations Committee Hearing 5/31/07
- Assembly Floor Vote 6/06/07
- Senate Environmental Quality Committee Hearing scheduled 7/02/07
- Senate Health Committee Hearing scheduled 7/11/07

SUPPORT (partial list, additional support listed on the back of this sheet)

Pesticide Action Network (Co-Sponsor)
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (Co-Sponsor)
Physicians for Social Responsibility - Los Angeles (Co-Sponsor)
United Farm Workers of America (Co-Sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Shannon McKinney
Office of Assemblywoman Sally Lieber
(916) 319-2022
shannon.mckinney@asm.ca.gov

Margaret Reeves
Pesticide Action Network North America
(415) 981-1771
mreeves@panna.org

SUPPORT (continued)

BayKeeper
Breast Cancer Action
Breast Cancer Fund
California Food and Justice Coalition
California Labor Federation
Californians for Alternatives to Toxics
Californians for Pesticide Reform
Coalition for Clean Air
Environment California
Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo County
Environmental Justice Coalition for Water
Fresno Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides
Health and Habitat, Inc.
Kirsch Foundation
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
Learning Disabilities Association of California
Natural Resources Defense Council
Parents for a Safer Environment
Pesticide Alternatives for Santa Clara County
Pesticide Free Zone Campaign
Planning and Conservation League
SEIU (Local 521)
Sierra Club California
Teamsters
United Food & Commercial Workers, Western States Council
Worksafe!

Rob McConnell, MD, Professor of Preventative Medicine, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California

Elizabeth Falade, MD, MPH, Health Officer at San Benito County Health and Human Services Agency