



Methyl Bromide Use in California

What is Methyl Bromide?

- * Methyl bromide is a toxic pesticide that is injected into soil before planting strawberries, grapes, almonds and other crops. It is also used to kill pests in stored commodities, in agricultural shipments and in buildings.
- * Because of its ability to cause poisonings, neurological damage and reproductive harm, EPA classifies methyl bromide as a Toxicity Category I compound, the most deadly category of substances.
- * Methyl bromide is also a powerful ozone depleter and will be banned in industrialized countries (including the U.S.) in 2005 under the international Montreal Protocol treaty. Ozone depletion is linked to raising rates of skin cancer, eye cataracts and damage to key ecosystems.

Methyl Bromide in California

- * California is one of the largest methyl bromide-using regions in the world. In 1998, California farmers and other users applied nearly 14 million pounds of this pesticide.
- * California strawberries are one of the largest single crop users of methyl bromide in the U.S. and around the world. In 1998, over 4 million pounds of methyl bromide were applied to California strawberry fields, accounting for 30% of the state's total use of this pesticide. Other large users of the pesticide include grapes, almonds, ornamental/nursery plants, sweet potatoes and watermelons.
- * Many schools in California are near farms where large quantities of methyl bromide are used. In 1998, nearly 70,000 children attended public schools that were 1.5 miles or less from fields treated with at least 10,000 pounds of methyl bromide, according to the Environmental Working Group.



Dangers to Human Health

- * At least 19 people in California died from exposure to methyl bromide from 1982 and 1997. In 1997, a Los Angeles woman died when the building next to her studio was fumigated with methyl bromide. California physicians reported 454 cases of methyl bromide poisoning from 1982 to 1993.
- * Methyl bromide is toxic to the central nervous system and can damage lungs and kidneys and possibly cause cancer. Direct exposure to the pesticide can lead to headaches, blurred vision, nausea and dizziness. Many farmworkers and residents near fumigated fields have experienced these symptoms.
- * During the past decade, thousands of California residents have been evacuated because of methyl bromide accidents, including Fresno (in 1987) Ceres (1984), Oxnard (1992) and Watsonville (1990). In 1998 and

1999 residents, teachers and parents experiencing illnesses from methyl bromide organized community actions around the state to prevent farmers from using toxic pesticides near their homes and schools.

- * In October 1997, methyl bromide concentration levels at Salsipuedes Elementary School in Watsonville were more than 10 times the state's safety standard following a fumigation at an adjacent strawberry field. The air monitoring, conducted by private environmental organizations, detected methyl bromide in air samples near the school as long as two days after the fumigation.

California Regulations Do Not Protect the Public

- * In January 2000, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation issued draft regulations on methyl bromide that do not protect school children, farmworkers or nearby residents from this dangerous chemical. The regulation do not adequately restrict methyl bromide use near schools, do not give neighbors enough warning about impending fumigations and do not provide protection to farmworkers from long-term exposure of this pesticide.
- * Environmental, consumer and farmworker groups across California are extremely disappointed that Governor Davis did not take this opportunity to develop regulations that truly protect the public from methyl bromide.

Safe Alternatives Exist

- * In 1998, the U.N. Methyl Bromide Technical Options Committee concluded there are existing alternatives for more than 95% of current methyl bromide uses. The Committee, made up of experts from 33 countries, identified a wide range of alternatives for most uses of the pesticide.
- * Alternatives are already used by many California farmers and pest control companies:
- * Organic strawberry growers use a variety of non-chemical alternatives, including crop rotation, pest-resistant root stocks and biological control, to produce strawberries without methyl bromide.
- * Methyl bromide use in California vineyards has decreased dramatically in recent years, including a 70% reduction from 1994 to 1998. Well-known vineyards such as Frey, Fetzer and Kendall-Jackson have ended their use of methyl bromide.
- * Existing non-chemical alternatives are much healthier for people, much safer for the environment and do not deplete the ozone layer.



