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HUNDREDS REPORT ADVERSE REACTIONS TO RECENT AERIAL PESTICIDE SPRAYINGS

Groups monitoring last fall's aerial sprayings in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties have received 643 complaints of illnesses and unusual symptoms.

Citizen groups and governmental agencies have received hundreds of complaints from people who said they had adverse physical reactions following the state's three recent rounds of aerial pesticide spraying in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, said a coalition of citizens' groups in a report issued today. The groups include the statewide organization Pesticide Watch Education Fund, as well as local groups California Citizens Against Spraying, and Helping Our Peninsula's Environment (HOPE).

Those who complained of adverse reactions said the spray caused symptoms ranging from asthma-like attacks and difficulty breathing, to chest pains, headaches, blurred vision, swollen glands, skins rashes and feelings of chronic fatigue.

"The number of people who have reported adverse reactions is alarming, and I believe further spraying must be halted until we can be certain it is safe," said Emily Reilly, a member of the Santa Cruz City Council.

"The California Constitution clearly states that all people have an inalienable right to pursue and obtain safety, and the aerial spraying of the synthetic pheromone and other chemicals on neighborhoods, playgrounds and schools could be in violation of this right," commented Mike Lynberg of *Concerned Citizens Against Aerial Spraying*.

The three rounds of spraying, which took place in September, October and November, have been part of the state of California's efforts to eradicate the light brown apple moth, a species that some consider a threat to agriculture.

Each round involved multiple sorties of airplanes dispersing a synthetic pheromone and variety of other chemicals, frequently over densely populated areas. The spray is classified as a pesticide by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Report Sent to State Legislature

About 290 of the citizen complaints came in through various grassroots reporting mechanisms, including a dedicated email address, ReactiontoSpraying@yahoo.com, a dedicated post office box for Reaction to Spraying, and two petitions related to the aerial spraying.

A consortium of citizen groups today sent many of the complaints in a detailed 193-page document to members of the California State Legislature, and to other city, state and federal governmental representatives. Copies of the report were also sent to the press with the names of citizens redacted to protect their privacy.

In addition to the 290 complaints received directly by citizen groups, the report cites 36 accounts from physicians who said they had patients who suffered from illnesses possibly linked to the aerial spraying. These 36 doctors' accounts were received by the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner's office following aerial spraying in that county in November, and are being investigated by that office.

The report also cites 317 complaints of adverse reactions received directly by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) following the three rounds of aerial spraying that took place in September, October and November.

Citizen groups learned about these 317 complaints in email correspondence with the CDFA. The complaints include 52 detailed illness reports (44 from the Monterey area, seven from the Santa Cruz area, and one from Santa Clara county), and 265 phone calls, email messages and other correspondence.

Number of Complaints Could Grow

Because there has not been a single, well publicized system for tracking and investigating adverse reactions to the aerial sprayings, there is likely to be some overlap in the 643 complaints, with people sending complaints to more than one entity.

While there might be some overlap in the complaints, Lynberg noted that the present tally of 643 complaints does not include complaints that might have been received by the office of Governor Schwarzenegger. Nor do they include complaints made directly to state and federal representatives, and to mayors, city council members and city clerks. "We're trying to get these numbers, which could add to the total," he said.

Ed Porter, a member of the Santa Cruz City Council added, "Unfortunately, many citizens did not know how to register complaints of adverse reactions, and many front-line urgent care providers, pediatricians, allergists and other physicians were not adequately instructed how to recognize and report possible pesticide-related illnesses among their patients. It's very possible that many people went to their doctors and their suspected adverse reactions were not adequately reported."

Randy Baker, a family physician from Soquel, CA, added, "Midway through the three aerial sprayings, the CDFA stated that the only way a citizen's complaints of illness would be taken seriously is if they were validated by a doctor. However, I have patients who told me that others doctors refused to file a report on their reactions, even though it is required by law."

Some People Possibly Vulnerable to Spray

A number of the complaints received directly by citizen groups were from people who said they were particularly sensitive to chemicals in the environment, and from people with asthma and other respiratory ailments. Parents of children who had unusual symptoms and illnesses also issued complaints.

Jeff Haferman, Vice Mayor of Monterey, remarked, “Protecting those who are most vulnerable is a hallmark of civilization, and while the aerial spraying might not adversely impact everyone, there is reason to believe it is harming some. The rights of these citizens need to be protected.”

Tony Madrigal a member of the Santa Cruz City Council, added, “While California’s agriculture business is vitally important, no one, including the Governor, I think, wants to sacrifice the health of children and other vulnerable citizens for produce. That’s why the spraying needs to stop so we can have a thorough public process, including an Environmental Impact Report.”

CDFA Says the Spraying Poses “No Risk”

Throughout the aerial spraying campaign, the CDFA has called its program to eradicate LBAM the safest in that agency’s history, saying it believed the synthetic pheromones posed no risk to human beings or the environment.

Likewise, on November 16, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR) and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) issued a joint letter saying that while high doses of the microencapsulated synthetic pheromones could cause eye, skin and respiratory irritation, “the application rates were extremely low.”

Despite these reassurances, citizen groups have remained concerned. Because the products being sprayed are classified as pesticides by the United States EPA, it was not possible for state agencies to test them on human beings prior to spraying them on highly populated urban areas.

“The science establishing the safety of the spraying simply is not there,” commented Dr. Doug Hulstedt, a pediatrician in Monterey. “In effect, this has been an experiment on a grand scale. The Nuremberg Code, which is adhered to by the National Institutes of Health, prohibits medical experimentation on human subjects without their informed consent. I believe the same code of ethics should be adhered to in this situation.”

Spraying Could Continue for Years

The citizen groups issuing today’s report are asking the CDFA and Governor Schwarzenegger to put human health and safety first, as new rounds of spraying could begin in the Monterey and Santa Cruz areas as early as February.

Spraying could begin elsewhere, too. The light brown apple moth has been found in several California counties, and in highly populated cities such as San Francisco and Berkeley.

The CDFA has declared the situation to be an emergency, giving it broad powers and enabling it to spray without issuing an Environmental Impact Report in advance.

However, Jim Carey, a professor of entomology at the University of California-Davis, has cast doubt on whether the aerial spraying can be effective, saying the pest is too established to be eradicated. “This thing is so widespread that there is no way that they're going to eradicate it,” said Carey in an interview with the Monterey Herald in December.

Citizens Groups Ask for Safety First

David Dilworth, Executive Director, Helping our Peninsula's Environment, is a leading proponent of finding a safer, more environmentally-friendly approach if eradication measures are taken at all.

“Alternatives exist,” Dilworth explained. “Aerial spraying has been called the ‘least effective’ way to control the light brown apple moth because at least 99 percent of the spray has no effect on the widely dispersed moths at all. A more effective and less costly solution is pheromone-scented sticky traps, which the state has used to trap the 9,000 moths they’ve caught so far.”

The groups issuing today's report also asked that the ingredients in the products being sprayed be thoroughly disclosed, including their relative concentrations and how they are manufactured.

“This data needs to be studied by an objective and trusted third party, and peer reviewed by an accredited and comprehensive panel of experts who might be able to shed light on the adverse reactions that many people believe they have suffered,” said Paul Schramski, State Director, Pesticide Watch Education Fund.

The executive summary and full report can be found at <http://www.1hope.org/chkmate.htm>.

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