

Pajaro students take a stand for their health & against methyl iodide

Oct 28, 2010 by Kathryn Gilje



A couple of weeks ago I wrote about the inspirational high school students in Watsonville, California who are taking action to prevent themselves and their community from the proposed new strawberry pesticide, methyl iodide. Last night, they went to the Pajaro Valley United School District, and the district signed a resolution for further study on methyl iodide before it is released into the environment. What amazing young people we have in this state — I look forward to their leadership of our state as we grow older. Here's what happened.

PVUSD takes stand against controversial pesticide

[By Donna Jones -- Santa Cruz Sentinel](#)

WATSONVILLE - Pajaro Valley school leaders want the state to do more homework on a proposed pesticide before putting it to use in California fields.

After listening to students, teachers and community members express concern about potential health risks of methyl iodide Wednesday, the board of trustees unanimously passed a resolution asking the state to conduct more research.

Trustee Willie Yahiro said the request was "not outrageous."

"It's asking for more common sense. It's just everybody take a step back and look at the scientific data," Yahiro said.

Some studies have linked methyl iodide to fetal deformity, miscarriage and thyroid disease in animals. California lists the chemical as a carcinogen under Proposition 65.

But the state Department of Pesticide Regulation has proposed permitting its use with restrictions officials say are stringent enough to protect the public. Many in the scientific community disagree.

Methyl iodide is important to agriculture because it's a proven alternative to methyl bromide, an ozone-depleting chemical being phased out under international treaty. Methyl bromide is a widely used fumigant in strawberry production, and is the No. 1 pesticide used by growers in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

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Wednesday, speakers reminded the board that many district schools are surrounded by agricultural fields and that many parents work on the farms.

Cabrillo College student Lizette Bedolla Cruz said her 10-year-old brother attends MacQuiddy Elementary School, where the playground backs up to a field.

"I don't want my little brother to breathe this pesticide," she said. "My mother works in raspberry fields, and I don't want her to breathe this pesticide. My uncle works in strawberry fields and I don't want him to breathe this pesticide."

Renaissance High School student Stephanie Lopez said she is five months pregnant.

"I don't want to worry about my baby not making it," Lopez said. "I want my baby to be healthy."

Jenn Laskin, a Renaissance High teacher, told the board it was important to act now due to concern that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger might approve its use "as a parting gift to the state."

Trustee Sandra Nichols said she had already written a letter expressing her concerns to state officials.

"We're not actually saying we know all there is to know," Nichols said. "We're saying until it is tested and scientists agree on it, we don't want it around our population or our food."

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