Chemical industry wins on strawberry pesticide, for now

Dec 8, 2010 by Kathryn Gilje

Today, California approved a cancer-causing pesticide that scientists call "difficult, if not impossible to control," and "one of the most toxic chemicals on earth."

Why? Here's my bet: the intense lobbying effort waged by Arysta LifeScience, largest private pesticide company in the world, who hired a Kentucky-based PR firm to create a "CA grassroots campaign" in favor of the pesticide, and who engaged the likes of a former assistant to Karl Rove in their efforts. Bluntly put: chemical company interests trumped the science and the concerns of Californians. Now we've all got an incredibly potent, new carcinogen to deal with while Arysta heads home to its headquarters and makes money off its sales.

Beyond the chemical company sway over our democracy, this irks even more because viable alternatives exist and farmers are ingeniously employing them across the state. Organic strawberries are grown small- to large-scale in California. Further, methyl iodide is linked to late-term miscarriages. Workers, who will be exposed because because fumigants are "difficult, if not impossible to control," are deeply concerned. And finally, methyl iodide promises to contaminate our groundwater. Higher levels of iodide are already found in Florida groundwater, where methyl iodide is already being used.

On a personal note, this particular decision-day couldn't hit much closer to home. I spent most of the evening last night in a hospital waiting room while a dear friend underwent her third surgery for cancer. This fight is not over.

Take Action >> Now is the time to send a clear message to incoming California Governor Jerry Brown. Join us in telling the Brown Administration that Californians and people across the nation expect him to protect scientific integrity and public health over chemical industry profits. With 90% of the nation's strawberries coming from California, this is a national issue. Urge him to reverse the approval of methyl iodide.

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