Good Lunchbox News: EPA Bans Sale of Apple Pesticide

Statement from Emily Marquez, PhD, staff scientist at Pesticide Action Network regarding the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's decision earlier today to cancel the use of the insecticide azinphos-methyl (AZM):

"EPA made an important announcement today, especially for rural children headed back to school, when it banned future sales of the neurotoxic apple pesticide AZM.

The decision affirmed earlier findings that rural children face a triple threat from organophosphate pesticides like AZM, at their homes or schools, in the food they eat, and "take-home" exposures from parents who work in agricultural fields. Children face exposure from the pesticide as it drifts from the point of application and the chemical is found on over 30% of apples in the United States. Organophosphate pesticides affect children's brain development for the long term.

But the EPA's announcement doesn't go into effect quickly enough. The agency is allowing use of existing stocks of the pesticide for one more year. This prolongs a phase-out that should have taken place in 2004, when farmworker and environmental groups sued EPA demanding action. This delay also means that a neurotoxic pesticide may still be found on fruit that children consume.

AZM is most widely used on apples, followed by cherries, pears and parsley. The insecticide is predominantly used in Washington, Oregon, California Michigan and New York. According to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation — the only state that clearly tracks pesticide use — over 1,000 pounds of the chemical were used on apples in 2010."

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