

Rubber-stamping pesticides?

Apr 4, 2013 by Paul Towers



Last week, our colleagues at NRDC released a compelling [new report](#) that highlights just how broken the pesticide approval process really is.

The report spotlights the problem of so-called “conditional” registrations, a streamlined approval process that pesticide manufacturers use to rush their products to market — while EPA turns a blind eye.

Jennifer Sass, lead author of the report and senior staff scientist at NRDC, [said](#):

“Pesticides are harmful chemicals that Congress intended go through a rigorous scientific review process. Instead, they’re going through a loophole, forcing us to trust the data provided by the pesticide industry.”

The scale of conditional registration abuse wasn’t known until recently, but the impacts have already been felt. From bees to [trees](#) to children, the known harms from conditionally registered pesticides are clear. This is reason enough for the agency to overhaul a system that is clearly broken.

Fast-tracking

Before a new pesticide product goes to market, EPA is supposed to conduct a rigorous review of possible health and environmental impacts, including analysis of scientific literature, data from the manufacturer and public comments.

Conditional registration, in contrast, was meant to be a short-term measure, designed to expedite the use of new pesticides in emergency situations — especially in the cases of disease outbreaks — while additional data is gathered. Instead, it has been used by industry to bring thousands of untested products to market, while the agency largely ignores the problem.

According to EPA’s own [analysis](#), abuse of the process is widespread. An internal review found that between 2004 and 2010, conditional registration was misused 98% of the time. Of the 16,000+ pesticides on the market in 2010, about 11,000 were conditionally registered.

What’s more, as new data have come to light or were found to be flawed — as is the case with

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[bee-harming pesticides](#) — the agency has failed to reassess conditional registrations promptly, sometimes waiting 15 years for review. And, as with most pesticides, once on the market conditionally registered pesticides are incredibly difficult to put back on the shelf.

Fixing the system

PAN is committed to pressuring policymakers to fix this flawed system. Just two weeks ago, we [filed a lawsuit](#) with beekeepers against EPA for allowing bee-harming pesticides to be brought to market through conditional registration. We hope they take it seriously as they consider a broader overhaul of the system. We urge the agency to take the following actions, and soon:

- Immediately cancel conditionally registered pesticides that are missing critical studies about impacts on the environment and health;
- Make the process of conditional registration more publicly accessible, including transparent information and a timeline for public comments; and
- Make conditional registrations limited to a specific, short-term time frame as was initially intended.

EPA has a responsibility to act, and act quickly, to address the thousands of untested pesticides on the marketplace. The good news is that the agency has the discretion to do it. With momentum building from PAN, our partners and engaged individuals like you, we believe agency action could — finally — be on the horizon.

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