June 4, 2014

Brian R. Leahy, Director
California Department of Pesticide Regulation

RE: DPR response to DPH report

Dear Director Leahy:

With the release of the California Department of Public Health’s report “Agricultural Pesticide Use Near Public Schools,” Californians now have reliable data about the use of hazardous agricultural pesticides near public schools around the state. The report’s findings indicate that children in agricultural regions in particular face a very real threat of having their health and development harmed by pesticides in their places of learning – places where they spend about one thousand hours each year. In 2010 alone, an estimated 538,912 pounds of pesticides of public health concern were applied within ¼ mile of public schools in the 15 counties DPH studied. Children at schools in the Monterey Bay area, where we work, had the highest percentage of children near such pesticide use. The science is clear that these pesticides, often used in alarmingly high quantities, put at risk children’s health, development and even intelligence potential.

As the agency charged with regulating these pesticides, it is DPR’s responsibility to incorporate the information and recommendations provided by your sister agency into your oversight program. As teachers, parents, and others involved in childhood development, it is our responsibility to ensure that activities near where children spend much of their time do not harm their health or potential. As such, we would like to know how DPR intends to address the issues detailed in the DPH report.

In addition to the DPH report recommendations for gathering and sharing better information on pesticide use near schools, we would like to hear what DPR is doing to advance more substantive protections for children, including:

- Establish consistent, large, health-protective “protection zones” statewide around schools and where highly hazardous pesticides are applied.
- Require 48-hour advance notification of highly hazardous agricultural pesticide use near schools.
- Create an electronic, publicly accessible database tracking site-specific agricultural pesticide applications.
• Establish a comprehensive air-monitoring program and conduct annual analysis noting trends in pesticide use near schools, childcare centers and other sensitive sites.
• Reduce the use of highly hazardous pesticides.
• Transition California to safe, sustainable fumigant alternatives by 2020.

School may be out for the summer for most children, but when they return in the fall, it will be around the time that is also the highest use season for Telone, a drift-prone fumigant and known carcinogen. High Telone use near schools was documented in the report and is of significant concern to our organizations.

Thus, there’s little time to waste. It is our collective responsibility to act on this proof of a potential threat to our children that was long suspected but is now quantified. Please let us know how DPR is responding and what we can do to support your regulatory efforts to protect children in their learning environments. We would like to meet with your office as soon as possible to discuss. You can contact Cesar Lara, Executive Director of the Monterey Bay Central Labor Council, at 831-444-5060 to discuss a time and place for representatives of our agencies and organizations to meet.

Sincerely,

Francisco Rodriguez
President
Pajaro Valley Federation of Teachers,
AFT Local 1936

Steve McDougall
President
Salinas Valley Federation of Teachers,
AFT Local 1020

Robert Chacanaca
President
Santa Cruz Council of Classified Employees,
AFT Local 6084

James Gutman
Central Coast Counties California Teachers Association

cc: Gov. Jerry Brown, Dr. Ronald Chapman, Sec. Matthew Rodriguez, State Senator Bill Monning, Assemblymember Luis Alejo, Assemblymember Mark Stone