

SAFE STRAWBERRY MONTEREY BAY WORKING GROUP

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Brian Leahy, Director
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Dear Director Leahy and Chief Farnsworth:

We welcome DPR's attention to the problem of pesticide use near schools because as a concerned coalition of Monterey Bay residents, we have serious concerns about heavy agricultural pesticide use near local schools. According to recent State studies, Monterey County has the highest percentage of children—more than one in four—who attend schools near the heaviest use of hazardous pesticides. State conducted studies at the only school in the Monterey Bay region with an air-monitoring program, Ohlone Elementary School, have found the carcinogenic pesticide 1,3-dichloropropene above or near cancer-warning concentrations. By 2016, DPR should move swiftly to adopt new protections for schoolchildren from hazardous and volatile pesticides and find new ways to promote and support sustainable, cutting-edge agriculture.

We are a coalition of concerned labor unions, farmworker advocacy groups, environmental organizations, health professionals, civil rights groups, teachers, parents, and scientists in the Monterey Bay Region with chapters in Salinas and Watsonville. Pesticide reform to make our community safer from the health hazards of these drift-prone and dangerous chemicals is the main goal of our coordinated efforts.

We are particularly concerned about the disproportionate exposure of Latino schoolchildren, a fact documented by the Department of Public Health (DPH) report released last year. Latino children in Monterey County are 3.2 times as likely as white children to attend schools near the heaviest agricultural pesticide use. This is a civil rights violation that DPR must rectify by decreasing the risk of pesticide exposure at schools in the midst of agricultural fields. The DPH report also found soil fumigants and other pesticides which are known to cause cancer, reproductive system effects, harm to the brain and nervous system and respiratory effects being used in large quantities within 1/4 mile of many rural California schools.

DPR should require one mile protection zones (buffer zones) between fields where pesticides of public health concern are used and schools, childcare centers, school bus stops, and known school routes. Pesticides of public health concern include pesticides that show evidence of causing cancer, reproductive damage, harm to the brain and nervous

system, and asthma and other respiratory problems. Protection zones of ¼ mile currently required in some counties (which is far more than required in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties) are simply not adequate for health protection. The UC Davis MIND Institute recently showed that mothers who lived within a mile of fields where chlorpyrifos and other pesticides were sprayed while pregnant show a 60% higher chance of having children with autism. The CHAMACOS research from UC Berkeley has found elevated levels of chlorpyrifos in the bodies of women and children also within a mile of pesticide applications. These studies were conducted largely in the Salinas Valley. The DPH report documented that chlorpyrifos was the 8th most common pesticide used within ¼ mile of schools in 2010, and Greenfield High School in Monterey County had the 4th highest amount in California.

Second, no-spray protection zones around schools should be enforced at all times for ground, air blast, as well as for aircraft applications, because students, teachers and community members are often on school grounds for scheduled events and unscheduled activities when school is not formally in session. Furthermore, pesticides can evaporate off the crop plants for an extended period after they are applied and pesticide contaminated dust can be blown onto school grounds and tracked into classrooms.

Third, once the new no-spray protection zones are in place, DPR should conduct ongoing air monitoring at half a dozen schools around the state that have been identified as having the most pesticides of public health concern applied nearby. Any exceedances of health screening levels detected by air monitors should be immediately reported to local school and county officials, parents and teachers and should trigger an expansion of the protection zone.

Fourth, while large, one-mile buffer zones are essential for reducing exposure and protecting children's health, if any pesticide use continues to be allowed within 1 mile of schools, advance notification should be provided to the schools. Schools should then be required to notify teachers and use the robo-call systems to notify parents.

Finally, while these are important first steps, your department needs to devote significant resources and attention, in collaboration with other agencies and universities, to reducing the use of and phasing out the use of soil fumigants and other high toxicity, drift-prone pesticides and helping farmers obtain resources to assist with this transition. Through innovation in agriculture, we can help California farmers adopt cutting-edge practices and tools that keep agriculture prosperous.

Thank you for your commitment to the state's children and to the success of our farmers.

Sincerely,



Carole Erickson
Co-chair