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## **Pesticides Pollute Air: Community Activists Prove Contamination**

### **Tulare County Residents Poisoned Regularly by Pesticides, Local Groups Call for Greater Protection against Toxic Smog**

LINDSAY, CA—As the annual summer spray season ramps up in Lindsay, Tulare County community groups, residents and statewide organizations join together today for the first-ever public announcement of results from the “Drift Catcher”—a community pesticide air monitoring device—and results from a community pesticide survey. Air monitoring results and the survey both document unsafe levels of pesticides in Tulare County air. These groups are calling on county and state agencies to take strong measures to protect the health of local children and the community as a whole from toxic pesticide smog.

Using the Drift Catcher, Lindsay residents tested the levels of the neurotoxic insecticide chlorpyrifos in their air over the past two years during the summer spray seasons. Results reveal that levels of chlorpyrifos in Lindsay’s air exceeded the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-established level deemed “safe” for children by up to 7.9 times in 2004, and up to 6.6 times in 2005. In 2005, over 20% of the samples contained chlorpyrifos levels that exceeded these “safe” levels for children; in 2004, over 10% of samples exceeded “safe” levels for children.

“Children and residents of Lindsay are breathing pesticide-contaminated air at levels of serious concern,” said Dr. Margaret Reeves, Senior Scientist at Pesticide Action Network.

Despite a national ban on chlorpyrifos in 2000 for residential uses because of the health risks it poses to children, the pesticide is still used widely in agriculture on oranges, cotton and almonds. Over 182,000 pounds of the pesticide were used in Tulare County in 2003. Exposure to chlorpyrifos can cause headaches, inability to concentrate, nausea, blurred vision, vomiting, slow heartbeat and difficulty breathing. Studies on pregnant women show a link between exposure to chlorpyrifos and low birth weights and reduced head circumference in babies. Recent studies on fetal and newborn rats show that low-level exposure to chlorpyrifos interferes with development of the nervous system. The pesticide has been implicated in both causing and exacerbating asthma.

Drifting airborne pesticides pose a major air quality and health threat in the San Joaquin Valley. Many airborne pesticides are toxic, causing acute pesticide poisonings as well as long-term

diseases such cancer. Pesticides are also the fourth biggest contributor to asthma-causing Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) emissions or “smog” in the San Joaquin Valley. Chlorpyrifos products alone account for 8.7% of all pesticide VOC emissions in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

“Pesticides aren’t just any air pollution problem: they create *toxic smog*,” commented Teresa DeAnda, Central Valley Representative at Californians for Pesticide Reform. “That makes them one of the most dangerous health and air quality problems we face in the valley today.”

In a survey conducted by local organizations in 2005, Tulare County residents confirmed widespread pesticide exposure and poisonings in the area. Over 40% of survey respondents reported being drifted on by pesticides, and these respondents reported experiencing at least 400 drift incidents. The most common poisoning symptoms experienced were burning eyes, headaches, rashes and a chemical taste in the mouth. Less than half of respondents knew that it is illegal for pesticides to drift through the air and contaminate people or damage property, and the vast majority (80%) did not know who to call if they were drifted on.

“County agencies need to wake up and smell the pesticides! They always say that there’s no problem, but Tulare residents are being exposed and poisoned every day and have no idea who to call for help,” said Luis Zamora, a community educator.

Tulare groups and residents who are part of the statewide Safe Air for Everyone (SAFE) Campaign are calling on the Tulare County Agriculture Commissioner and Board of Supervisors to establish “Protection Zones” that prevent pesticide applications nearby homes, schools, businesses and hospitals across the county.

“Breathing clean air is a human right,” said Irma Arrollo, Director of El Quinto Sol, a community group in Lindsay. “We need to protect the health of our children and our communities by making sure that pesticides are not applied right next to where we live, work and play.”

In addition, groups across the state that are part of the SAFE Campaign are asking the California Department of Pesticide Regulation to:

- Help growers move away from toxic pesticides like chlorpyrifos and adopt least-toxic integrated pest management techniques.
- Reduce the use of gaseous, fumigant pesticides, the biggest pesticide-contributors to VOC emissions.

*Drift Catcher design and implementation has been evaluated by a Scientific Advisory Committee comprised of scientists from the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, the California Air Resources Board, US EPA Region 9, and the California Department of Health Services. Invented by Dr. Susan Kegley, Chemist and Senior Scientist at Pesticide Action Network, Drift Catchers are being used by communities in six states (California, Washington, Indiana, Minnesota, Colorado, and North Carolina), with more planned.*