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## NEWS RELEASE

# **Tulare County Residents Win Greater Protection from Dangerous Pesticides**

## **New rules announced for pesticide applications around schools, homes and labor camps**

PLAINVIEW, CA—After over two years of calling on local authorities for greater protection from airborne pesticides, communities celebrate the Tulare County Agricultural Commissioner's announcement of new buffer zone rules. As spray season gets underway, communities across Tulare County welcome these changes and call for even stronger protections to protect the health of communities from toxic and illegally drifting airborne pesticides.

The new county rules—or “permit conditions”—require a buffer zone of one-quarter mile prohibiting aerial applications of restricted use pesticides around schools in session or due to be in session within 24 hours, occupied farm labor camps and residential areas. Gary Kunkel, the Tulare County Agricultural Commissioner, signed the rules into effect on January 1, 2008.

“The times are changing about when, where and how pesticides can be applied,” said Gustavo Aguirre, Assistant Director of Organizing at Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment. “The ‘business as usual’ approach of poisoning community members and polluting the air is no longer acceptable.”

The Allensworth School Board, the Cutler-Orosi School Board and over 1750 organizations and individuals have endorsed the call for buffer zones in Tulare County. Community members launched efforts to establish buffer zones because of the serious health risks posed by pesticide exposure, ranging from short-term effects such as dizziness, vomiting and rashes to long-term effects including asthma, cancer, birth defects, damage to the developing child and neurological harm.

Community efforts have included conducting surveys documenting the general public's exposure to pesticides, sampling for pesticides in their air and in residents' bodies, and presenting local authorities with a petition endorsing the establishment of buffer zones around sensitive sites such as schools. Over 50% of all public schools in Tulare County are within one-quarter mile of agricultural operations, putting the county's children at high risk of exposure.

Towns such as Plainview that are next to alfalfa or cotton fields where aerial applications are common will benefit most from the new rules. The rules apply only to restricted use pesticides, or those that applicators must obtain a permit to apply because they are among the most hazardous to the health of humans and the environment.

“This is a great victory for communities who regularly and unwillingly breathe pesticides in their day to day lives,” said Irma Arrollo, Director of El Quinto Sol de América, a local Lindsay community group. “Regular people can change things when they get together. This is just a first step to protect the health of our families from pesticides. It’s an excellent start.”

These new Tulare permit conditions—the same as those in Kern and Kings counties—are the strongest buffer zones in the San Joaquin Valley. Other San Joaquin Valley counties either have weaker or no general buffer zone rules in place around schools, labor camps and residences.

“Drifting pesticides onto people is illegal, but inevitable in the way we currently farm,” commented Teresa DeAnda, Central Valley Representative of Californians for Pesticide Reform. “The writing is on the wall that pesticide air pollution is no longer acceptable. We need to support growers to grow crops without using toxic pesticides.”

The Safe Air for Everyone (SAFE) Campaign aims to prevent pesticide air pollution in California and support a safe and sustainable farming system that protects the health of farmworkers, their families, other directly affected communities and the environment.

## **Contacts Available for Interviews:**

### *Community Members & Advocates:*

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- **Karl Tupper**, Staff Scientist and Coordinator, Environmental Monitoring Program, Pesticide Action Network, [karl@panna.org](mailto:karl@panna.org), 415-981-1771 x314

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