

MEDIA RELEASE
March 16, 2010

CONTACTS:
Paul S. Towers, Pesticide Watch, 916-216-1082
Charles Margulis, Center for Environmental Health, 510-695-5695

New Study: California Protects Crops More Stringently Than Children

Stringent, Complex Restrictions Also Apply for Protecting Bees and Weeds, Yet No Simple Rule Exists to Protect Children

Sacramento-A new report analyzing regulations from California's 25 top agricultural counties finds that many counties do more to protect crops than children from potentially harmful pesticide drift. The report, *Pesticide Protection Zones: Keeping Kids Safe at School*, found that eleven counties have no protection zones around schools at all, while another six only limit spraying when school is in session. By contrast, the report notes that nearly 25% of the counties have larger pesticide buffer zones for crops than for schools.

"It seems insane to have stringent rules protecting nuts and peaches while schoolchildren remain at risk from chemicals that can cause cancer, birth defects, and other serious health problems," said Paul Towers, director of Pesticide Watch Education Fund and a co-author of the report. "But that's exactly what's happening in counties across California. Its past time for a simple, statewide rule that protects all California children from pesticide drift at school."

"Our children deserve to be protected from these cancer-causing chemicals," said Assemblymember Sandré Swanson, who has introduced AB 1721, the Health and Safety School Zones Act, to fix the problem. The bill would adopt a simple, statewide rule prohibiting pesticide spraying within a quarter mile of any California school. "The people of California have made it clear that clean air is a right and not a privilege. Many communities have recognized the unintended side-effects of aerial spraying and have passed rules to protect their school sites," said Assemblymember Swanson. "I will work cooperatively with the Legislature to pass this common sense approach to protect our children," said Assemblymember Swanson.

There is currently no statewide regulation in California providing for pesticide protection zones around schools, but only a patchwork of inconsistent and inadequate county rules. In six counties, school protection zones apply only when children are present, even though many pesticides persist in the environment and can pose health threats long after spraying. By contrast, rules prohibiting pesticide spraying to protect the state's agricultural sector are detailed and stringent. For example, the report found that

- In Colusa County, areas around schools are less protected than those around many crops, including walnuts, peaches, rice and others. Regulations state that when "sensitive crops" are more than one mile away and are downwind, "**extreme caution** must be used under all conditions." [emphasis in the original]

- In Kern County, spraying of certain pesticides is restricted within one quarter (1/4) mile of schools only when children are present, but to protect bees, spraying of three insecticides is prohibited within one mile of almond orchards.
- In Tulare County, spraying of certain pesticides is restricted within one quarter (1/4) mile of schools only when school is in session, but spraying of three insecticides is prohibited within one (1) mile of any pollinating fields, even when weeds are the only pollinating plants.
- In Sutter County, spraying of certain pesticides is restricted within one quarter (1/4) mile of schools is prohibited when school is in session, but spraying of one herbicide is prohibited four (4) miles around prunes.

In California, 90% of pesticides used are prone to “pesticide drift,” the movement of pesticides away from the application site. Almost 20% pesticides used in California are known to cause cancer, almost 10% are known to damage the nervous system, and more than 10% are known to harm the reproductive system. Children are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of pesticide exposure because of their rapidly growing bodies.

While it is illegal to expose people to drifting pesticides, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation admits that “some off-site movement occurs with **every** [pesticide] application” and “drift into surrounding areas is expected with **all** pesticide applications.” [emphases added] A 2005 study by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found more than 250 incidents of pesticide exposure to children occurred in California schools between 1998-2002, with 50 of the incidents resulting from nearby agricultural pesticide use. NIOSH recommends establishing and enforcing pesticide spray buffer zones around schools to protect children.

The report, *Pesticide Protection Zones: Keeping Kids Safe at School*, was co-released by Pesticide Watch Education Fund, The Center for Environmental Health, and published by Californians for Pesticide Reform, a statewide coalition of over 185 groups working to protect public health and the environment from the dangers of pesticide use. It is available at www.PesticideReform.org or www.PesticideWatch.org.

###

Contacts Available for Interviews:

Caroline Cox, Research Director, Center for Environmental Health, 541-654-2626 (cell), caroline@ceh.org.

Teresa DeAnda, Central Valley Coordinator, Californians for Pesticide Reform, 661-304-4080 (cell), teresa@jgc.org.

Amber Wise, PhD, UC San Francisco Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment, 510-986-8926 (office), wisea@obgyn.ucsf.edu.