



Californians For
Pesticide Reform

November 24, 2020

Director Val Dolcini
California Department of Pesticide Regulation

Via email: val.dolcini@cdpr.ca.gov

Re: November 17th Environmental Justice Workshop

Dear Director Dolcini:

We must express the concern, voiced by many of our members, about the content, structure, and implementation of DPR's November 17th Environmental Justice Workshop. In light of feedback DPR has received about prior EJ workshops, we had hoped the department would address the need to orient the content away from a one-sided presentation of information about state and county programs and toward an actual discussion of the racial and environmental injustice of pesticide use. Sharing information with communities about how pesticides are regulated in California is valuable, but the events as designed aren't and shouldn't be called environmental justice workshops. Community members are hungry for a good faith discussion of the racial inequity inherent in California's pesticide-dependent system of agriculture, and we urge you to provide a real environmental justice forum for this long-overdue conversation to begin.

Lack of Environmental Justice Content

DPR's own website provides a good starting point for a workshop on environmental justice:

Treating people fairly guides how DPR conducts its activities. Fair treatment means that no one group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should be disproportionately impacted by pesticides.

The data speak for themselves: Latinx communities are exposed to a far greater agricultural pesticide burden than white communities. In DPR's own assessment, this clearly constitutes unfair treatment. Yet CalEPA staff's presentation, the second and shortest of the day, consisted only of a list of statements, meetings, and trainings within the Department regarding environmental justice, and shed no light on DPR's policies or proposed actions toward the goal of achieving it.

CPR's Angel Garcia was the only presenter to actually address what Environmental Justice is, by delineating the racially unjust impact of pesticide use in California, with pesticide use and demographic data to back it up. After Mr. Garcia ended his presentation, the phrase *environmental justice* was never spoken again by presenters over the next three hours.

Flawed, non-inclusive structure

The event was billed as a “workshop,” suggesting an exchange of ideas or the demonstration of strategies to address environmental justice. Instead, our members expressed frustration that the meeting was structured as a series of presentations unrelated to environmental justice, with little opportunity for interaction. No one but the presenters was even visible on Zoom. Participants were not able to see who else was on the call. After the first few minutes, no one was called on to speak. DPR staff and speakers refused to address, in real time, many of the EJ-related questions posed in the chat and Q&A boxes, even deleting some of them. We also heard that some questions that were posed publicly were answered privately. This is unacceptable in a public forum.

We look forward to receiving written responses to all of the questions posed in writing during the presentations, as promised, but would urge you to restructure the program in future so that these questions can be addressed live, in person, and in a manner that provides the opportunity for interactive discussion and follow-up questions.

Language access difficulties

The failure to accommodate monolingual speakers was especially disappointing. We certainly recognize the extra challenges in putting together online meetings, especially online meetings with interpretation – as a statewide coalition we face similar challenges nearly every day. Nevertheless, we have asked DPR repeatedly to ensure that those most impacted by the department's policies are able to communicate with DPR in their native language. DPR's inability, eight months into the pandemic, to provide equal access to all participants - especially in a workshop purportedly devoted to environmental justice - is simply not acceptable. It suggests a lack of prioritization to ensure equal access for monolingual speakers and a lack of will to make urgently needed improvements in this regard. There are other agencies and departments that have been successfully providing Spanish language interpretation during Zoom meetings for months now, and we recommend DPR technical staff reach out to sister agencies to learn how to ensure this moving forward.

Moreover, there was almost no effort made to translate the comments in the Q&A and chat boxes, where most of the actual discussion took place. A particularly erroneous statement written in Spanish by Martha Sanchez in the chat indicated that the schools

regulation provides schools with notification they can share with parents and students in order that they can protect themselves. The comment was inaccurate and went untranslated and unchallenged in the chat box by any official. Only after more than half an hour had passed did one DPR official - after repeated prompting by us via the chat box - finally speak to the issue and orally correct what Martha had written, but at that point there were issues with the Spanish interpretation.

Non-participation by agricultural commissioners

Finally, we note that not one single county agricultural commissioner attended the workshop, indicative of how environmental justice is viewed and prioritized by those charged with ensuring it.

We appreciate DPR's willingness to host these annual presentations about how pesticides are regulated in California, but ask DPR to stop calling them environmental justice workshops. Although we are aware that you collaborated with Nayamin Martinez and Angel Garcia on the development of the agenda, it is our understanding that their suggestions for providing more opportunity for community engagement were ignored.

We urge DPR to prioritize hosting true environmental justice workshops to address the desire of communities to discuss and strategize about how to rectify the environmental injustices in California's food system. We ask that you consider our feedback to ensure that future workshops are structured in a way that respects participants' opinions and demonstrates DPR's desire to achieve fair treatment for all Californians, regardless of race or income.

Finally, we ask that you provide the full list of questions and responses posted in the workshop, including those that were answered privately, and a copy of the Zoom recording, by December 4.

Sincerely,



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