



Latino Issues Forum
A Public Policy and Advocacy Institute



Contact:

Paola Ramos, Latino Issues Forum, (510) 508-3406

Monica Benitez, Latino Issues Forum, (626) 588-2386

NEWS RELEASE

**State Not Doing Enough to Prevent Community Poisonings from
Pesticide Drift**

**Advocacy Groups Urge Passage of Pending State Legislation to Provide Relief for
Pesticide Drift Victims and Better Training for Emergency Personnel**

SACRAMENTO – Concerned community members and advocacy groups from across the state join together today to release a policy brief on pesticides in our air titled *Better Safe than Sorry: Preventing Pesticide Drift in California*, authored by Latino Issues Forum and Redefining Progress, in collaboration with Californians for Pesticide Reform. The brief calls on California’s Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) to take immediate actions to prevent pesticide drift incidents, including phasing-out highly toxic and drift-prone pesticides currently being used in California. Communities at risk of pesticide poisoning also urge legislators to pass Senate Bill 391 by Senator Dean Florez which addresses official response to pesticide drift incidents.

Pesticide drift, the airborne movement of pesticides away from an intended target, is a dangerous and frequent occurrence in California’s agricultural fields and adjacent communities. Like secondhand smoke, pesticide drift presents a health hazard as pesticide concentrations in air near agricultural sites frequently exceed levels of concern. Pesticide drift has also been responsible for several mass community poisonings, including poisoning 173 residents of the Tulare County town of Earlimart in 1999, over 250 residents of the Kern County town of Arvin in 2002 and at least 140 residents of Lamont, also in Kern County, last October.

More than 90% of pesticides used in California are prone to drifting away from where they are applied, and 34% of the 188 million pounds of pesticides used in 2000 were highly toxic to humans, capable of triggering asthma and causing immediate poisoning, other respiratory illnesses, cancer, birth defects, sterility, neurotoxicity and/or damage to the developing child.

Instead of just managing pesticide drift, *Better Safe than Sorry: Preventing Pesticide Drift in California* calls on DPR to take strong measures to prevent the harmful human and environmental health effects of pesticide drift by phasing out six highly toxic, drift-prone pesticides, prohibiting the most drift-prone methods of pesticide applications (such as aerial spraying and by sprinkler), and establishing a panel of independent experts, farmworker representatives and other community members to recommend less-toxic alternatives to the pesticides being phased-out.

“Pesticide drift poisons entire communities in California’s agricultural areas where most of the people affected are low income, largely Latino communities already facing substantial amounts of chemical contamination, including air and water pollution,” said Rey León, Policy Analyst at Latino Issues Forum. “Pesticide drift is preventable, but DPR is not taking any serious action to protect the health of these communities across the state. We call on DPR and the Schwarzenegger administration to phase-out the most toxic and drift-prone pesticides currently in use in California as a crucial step in preventing further pesticide drift poisonings,” she added.

Hundreds of thousands of Californians live in areas where they are at risk of ill health from pesticide drift. As rural areas become suburban and urban, and fields are increasingly located next to residential areas and schools, pesticide drift is an ever-growing problem.

Better Safe than Sorry: Preventing Pesticide Drift in California makes strong recommendations to shift the burden of pesticide use away from victims by increasing fines for pesticide violations and using the funds to establish a revolving fund for victims of pesticide poisonings. Currently, when bystanders such as school children and other community members are poisoned by drifting pesticides, not only are they the ones who get sick, but currently they are forced to pay for resulting health care costs.

“If a construction team on your street knocks your fence down by mistake, you don’t have to pay to replace the fence,” said Disha Zaidi, Research Associate at Redefining Progress. “Instead of pesticide drift victims bearing the brunt of health care costs themselves, pesticide applicators must take financial responsibility if their operations harm others.”

Concerned community members across the state are urging legislators to establish a medical revolving fund for pesticide drift victims and proper official response to pesticide drift incidents through pending state legislation, Senate Bill 391, authored by Senator Dean Florez. Known as the Pesticide Drift Exposure Response Act, SB391 would also establish proper training for medical personnel who respond to pesticide incidents and a Public Accessibility Pilot Program that would give the public access to information about fumigant pesticide applications.

“SB391 is a long overdue remedy that will finally grant communities affected by pesticide drift the basic rights of respectful treatment by officials and appropriate medical care,” said Teresa DeAnda, pesticide drift victim and Central Valley Representative with Californians for Pesticide Reform.

Better Safe than Sorry: Preventing Pesticide Drift in California is co-authored by Latino Issues Forum, a statewide non-profit public policy and advocacy institute dedicated to advancing new and innovative public policy solutions for a better, more equitable and prosperous society, and specifically addresses how public policy issues will affect the social and economic future of the Latino community; and by Redefining Progress (RP) a non-profit think-tank based in Oakland, California working with a broad array of partners to shift the economy and public policy towards sustainability. RP’s programs focus on Sustainability Indicators, Common Assets, Sustainable Economics, and Environmental Justice.

Better Safe than Sorry: Preventing Pesticide Drift in California is available from Latino Issues Forum at 415-284-7220 or free online at www.lif.org, www.PesticideReform.org and www.rprogress.org.