

Support for the notification pilot program in Shafter pursuant to AB 617



January 29, 2021
Director Val Dolcini
Department of Pesticide Regulation
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Secretary Jared Blumenfeld
California Environmental Protection Agency
Jared.blumenfeld@calepa.ca.gov
Via email

Dear Director Dolcini and Secretary Blumenfeld:

The Californians for Pesticide Reform coalition and 23 community groups and environmental justice organizations write in strong support of the pilot notification program proposed for the Kern County town of Shafter, and we thank you for your leadership in ensuring that the commitment made through the AB 617 Community Air Protection Program is honored.

For many years, communities throughout California's agricultural regions have called for the basic right to know about planned applications of hazardous pesticides before they occur. Agricultural pesticides are linked to a wide range of human and environmental health impacts, and many are known to drift far from their intended target. Despite the state's extensive regulatory, enforcement and reporting apparatus, residents of communities on the frontlines of agricultural pesticide use are routinely exposed to a dangerous mixture of toxic chemicals, leading to well-documented acute and chronic health effects. Although pesticides are regulated individually by the Department of Pesticide Regulation, in reality communities are exposed to an entirely unregulated mixture of dangerous and drift-prone chemicals, including a number that are known carcinogens.

The planned pilot project would provide Shafter residents with advance notice, online and via text alert, of all approved Notices of Intent for planned applications of 1,3-dichloropropene, chloropicrin and MITC for the 7-mile radius around Shafter. All of these fumigant pesticides are known or suspected carcinogens. These notices are already provided by growers to the County Agricultural Commissioner (CAC) in advance, and in Kern County are also shared grower to grower. The proposed pilot would extend that notice publicly via an online portal. This poses no burden on the growers, and very little on the CAC, and yet provides an enormous public benefit for residents who, for the first time, would have the ability to take protective measures to prevent exposure. It's rare to be able to reach a solution that requires so little cost and so few resources. In terms of cost/benefit ratio, the cost is slight and the benefit incalculable.

We, the signatories to this letter, represent residents of communities across the state who share Shafter's pesticide pollution burden. We applaud the groundbreaking work of the Shafter community in winning this program for their town, and we are hopeful that it will soon be extended to all of California. We all want to know what we and our children are being exposed to, before it happens. The 13 California communities that have so far been selected for the AB 617 Community Emissions Reduction Program represent the very tip of the iceberg. Pilot programs such as those in Shafter offer the promise of meaningful pollution reduction across the state. In short, we all want for ourselves and our neighbors what Shafter has achieved.

We are baffled and appalled by the adamant refusal of the Kern CAC to implement the notification pilot, and disappointed by the support he has received from industry groups vested in the status quo and determined not to let the public know what they are doing. If these practices are as safe as they claim, why the secrecy? Continued lack of transparency serves only the agricultural industry. We reject industry's attempt to elevate their profits over the health and well-being of the farmworker communities in which they operate, with the apparent blessing of public servants such as the CAC, who are charged with protecting the public good.

California is a preemption state for pesticides, so it's jarring to hear calls now from industry for "local control." The state is well within its rights to request this public information and to make sure it reaches the public in advance, and we are grateful for your willingness to assert your authority to do so. Thank you again for your commitment to the health and wellbeing of agricultural communities.

Sincerely,



Sarah Aird and Jane Sellen, Co-Directors, **Californians for Pesticide Reform**

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