



931 E Market Street
Salinas, CA 93905

September 21, 2023

Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner Juan Hidalgo
1428 Abbott Street
Salinas, CA 93901

Via email: AgComm@co.monterey.ca.us

Dear Agricultural Commissioner Hidalgo,

Two years ago, we sent the attached study of pesticides linked to childhood cancers, "There's something in the air, and it causes childhood cancer," to the previous Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner and requested action to protect our county's children from these drift-prone cancer-causing chemicals. He did not respond.

We call on you to take action today, as we provide updated information about the use of these childhood cancer-causing pesticides in Monterey County.

Our previous report revealed regular use in the Monterey Bay area of 11 out of 13 pesticides identified in two recent studies by UCLA as being linked to early childhood cancers. The studies found that these pesticides increase risk of a child developing specific forms of cancers ranging from 1.60 times (or 60% increased chance) to 3.38 times (or 238% elevated risk), if their mothers lived within 2.5 miles of the pesticide application while pregnant. More than 28 countries have banned or not approved 10 of the 13 pesticides.

The first UCLA study from 2020, "[Prenatal pesticide exposure and childhood leukemia – A California statewide case-control study](#)," examined correlations between pesticide exposure and childhood leukemias, while the second article from 2021 looked at pesticide links to childhood brain tumors, "[Residential proximity to pesticide application as a risk factor for childhood central nervous system tumors](#)."

The scientific links to childhood cancer and pesticide exposure have been mounting for decades. What was new about these studies was that they were California-specific, provided correlations of individual pesticides to specific childhood cancer sub-types, and established links to in utero exposure over a long distance -- up to 2.5 miles from the pregnant mother's residence.

Current state regulations do not address exposure from applications at such distances and therefore do not account for normal pesticide drift. For example, the policy implemented in 2018 that restricts pesticide use around California public schools and daycares applies only to pesticides used within a ¼ mile of schools.

Our report found that while the overall combined trend in use by acreage is decreasing in the region, use of some of these individual carcinogenic pesticides had actually increased from the earlier period (1998-2011) studied by UCLA. Those trends have continued, according to the latest Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) Pesticide Use Reports, as we document below.

Use of pesticides linked to childhood cancers disproportionately impacts Latino areas of Monterey County, where nine of every 10 pounds of these pesticides are concentrated in the Latino-majority region of the Salinas Valley.¹

In light of the report's findings on pesticides linked to childhood cancers, Safe Ag Safe Schools (SASS) called for greater protections and transparency for Monterey Bay area residents, including public web-posting of upcoming pesticide applications and 2.5-mile buffer zones around schools, hospitals, and other sensitive sites, reflecting the distances pesticides are known to drift at harmful levels.

Childhood cancer rates are 15% higher in Monterey County than the California State average.² While scientists generally agree that cancers tend to have multiple causes, we are concerned that childhood cancer-causing pesticides contribute to the higher rates of this awful disease in our county.

Earlier this year, DPR released three years of Pesticide Use Report data from 2019-2021, which reveal that a yearly average of nearly 80,000 acres of Monterey County cropland were applied with the pesticides that UCLA scientists link to childhood cancers. If there is good news, it is that there was little to no use of four of the thirteen childhood cancer-linked pesticides during these three years. While six of these pesticides saw decreased use from the previous seven-year period (2012-2018), three increased – Propiconazole, Thiophanate-methyl, and Phosmet (although, in a hopeful sign, 2021 Phosmet use was zero). These data are summarized in the Table on the next page.

¹ See page 10 of attached report for more detailed information.

² NIH National Cancer Institute: State Cancer Profiles at <https://statecancerprofiles.cancer.gov/incidencerates/index.php?stateFIPS=06&areatype=county&cancer=516&race=00&sex=0&age=016&stage=999&year=0&type=incd&sortVariableName=rate&sortOrder=default&output=0#results> . Latest 5-year Average: 2016-2020. Childhood Cancer Rates (< 15 years old). California: 16.6 per 100,000. Monterey County: 19.1 per 100,000 (15% higher than State average).

TABLE: Pesticides linked to childhood cancers, Monterey County use by acres³

Pesticide	Linked to type of childhood cancer	2019 acres	2020 acres	2021 acres	2019- 2021 average acres	2012- 2018 average acres
<i>Bromacil</i>	diffuse astrocytoma	17	0	0	6	4
<i>Chlorothalonil</i>	medulloblastoma	21,323	19,818	18,030	19,724	24,079
<i>Dimethoate</i>	medulloblastoma	13,149	11,332	11,374	11,952	19,840
<i>Diuron</i>	acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL)	946	437	253	545	2,088
<i>Kresoxim-methyl</i>	acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), diffuse astrocytoma	4,229	3,652	175	2,685	9,445
<i>Linuron</i>	medulloblastoma	4,481	4,439	4,939	4,620	6,962
<i>Metam-sodium</i>	acute myeloid leukemia (AML)	<.01	<.01	<.01	<.01	72
<i>Paraquat dichloride</i>	acute myeloid leukemia (AML)	28,731	10,295	3,718	14,248	45,456
<i>Phosmet</i>	acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL)	35	100	0	45	33
<i>Propanil</i>	acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL)	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Propiconazole</i>	medulloblastoma	18,721	14,611	15,745	16,359	12,999
<i>Thiophanate-methyl</i>	diffuse astrocytoma, ependymoma	11,266	8,040	8,818	9,375	8,455
<i>Triforine</i>	diffuse astrocytoma	0	0	0	0	0
Total acres	all above childhood cancers	102,898	72,724	63,052	79,558	129,434
<i>Leukemia</i>	<i>ALL & AML</i>	33,941	14,484	4,146	17,524	57,094
<i>Brain Cancer</i>	<i>diffuse astrocytoma, ependymoma, medulloblastoma</i>	73,186	61,892	59,081	64,720	81,785

We believe that none of these pesticides linked to childhood cancers should be used in Monterey County, California, or anywhere else. We recognize that County Agricultural Commissioners do not have the power to ban a pesticide county-wide, but we know you can restrict use that “will present an undue hazard when used under local conditions” (The Food & Agricultural Code 14006.6(a)). The high use levels and 15% higher childhood cancer rates in Monterey County certainly present an undue hazard.

We call on you to take three immediate steps to protect children from pesticides linked to childhood cancers.

1 Since only four of these childhood cancer-causing pesticides are currently California restricted materials and thus do not require a notice of intent (NOI) for approval of applications by the County Agricultural Commissioner, **we call on you to demand NOIs for the rest**, so that

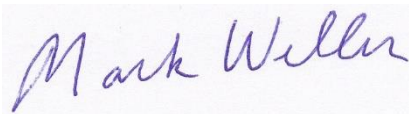
³ All data from DPR Pesticide Use Reports at <https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pur/purmain.htm>

you can take measures to protect our community. The Food & Agricultural Code 14006.6(a) does not require advanced notice of unrestricted material “unless the commissioner determines that its use will present an undue hazard when used under local conditions.” As an example, before chlorpyrifos was restricted in 2015, the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner required 48-hour NOIs and 300-foot buffers around schools for chlorpyrifos use.⁴ You can take similar actions regarding **Diuron, Phosmet, Kresoxim-methyl, Thiophanate-methyl, Linuron, Chlorothalonil, Dimethoate, and Propiconazole.**

2 **Web-post the NOIs for all 13 pesticides in real-time**, so that our communities can prepare and take safety precautions to protect our children.

3 **Apply emergency safety buffers of 2.5 miles around all residences, schools, hospitals, and other sensitive sites in which these pesticides linked to childhood cancers cannot be applied.** This stopgap measure should at least be in place until the process to end their use entirely is complete.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Weller". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light blue rectangular background.

Mark Weller

(For SASS, as Organizer Yanely Martinez is on medical leave)

⁴ *Agricultural Pesticide Use Near Public Schools in California*, CDPH, 2014, p. 55. <http://www.phi.org/wp-content/uploads/migration/uploads/application/files/m0lvrkqvtqh6897fl65fyegso0p8qqqudkrto9v13d6uiocq0r.pdf>