

Compensation for poisoned migrants ends

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RUSKIN — (AP) — While dozens of migrant workers injured in Florida's worst pesticide poisoning still complain of dizziness, headaches and numbness, they will no longer receive worker's compensation.

More than 100 farm workers were poisoned by the pesticide Phosdrin in a cauliflower field Nov. 15 at Goodson Farms in rural Hillsborough County.

But Wednesday, the final 45 farm

workers still receiving treatment passed blood tests and were given a note allowing them to return to work.

The action stops all worker's compensation from a private trust fund.

Dr. Dennis Penzell, medical director of the Ruskin Health Center, said he had to certify the workers were able to return to the fields because their blood tests were nor-

mal.

"Physically, they are appearing well," Penzell said. "But they are feeling bad. I'm having a hard time determining if it's pesticide-related.

We don't have an explanation."

Because many of the workers are illegal aliens ineligible for unemployment or other state aid, they have no choice but to return to the fields.

"This is difficult," said Angelica

Garcia. "I guess we'll just have to put up with it." Her blood tests came out "clean," but she said she still has feelings of weakness, headaches and numb legs.

One of the most seriously injured in the poisoning, Garcia was hospitalized in critical condition for five days.

In all, 112 workers became ill. Of them, 84 were treated in local health clinics and hospitals.

The state Department of Agriculture has called the accident the worst pesticide exposure case in Florida history.

The farm has been fined \$12,600 by the state Agriculture Department for allowing workers into the fields before the minimum 48-hour waiting period and not providing protective gear.

The farm operators are disputing the fine and would not comment on

the case.

While the blood tests are free of toxin, the workers' lingering illness has doctors worried about the long-term effects of the pesticide.

"That's what scares me," Penzell said. "We don't know what's going to happen down the road."

Although Phosdrin breaks down in 48 hours, health officials say it is extremely dangerous until then. Workers entered the field 16 hours after spraying.