

precise national incidence or prevalence of pesticide illnesses that occur in the agricultural sector." Also, "a number of federally sponsored studies are underway on the chronic effects of pesticide exposure, but it will be many years, perhaps decades, before conclusive results from these studies are known."



U.S. Dept. of Agriculture/Tim McCabe

the agency has not considered children under 12. The GAO also found that enforcement of the Standard is lax. Enforcement remains "in its infancy" with at least 15 states conducting fewer than 10 enforcement inspections per year. EPA has "little or no information on the results" of these investigations.

The report, while only a small step, should encourage EPA to initiate some critically overdue efforts to protect farmworkers and their children from pesticides.

—Caroline Cox

U.S. GAO. 2000. Pesticides: Improvements needed to ensure the safety of farmworkers and their children. Washington, DC, Mar. www.gao.gov.

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EPA Takes Action on Chlorpyrifos, Finally

● NEWS FROM AROUND

EPA TAKES ACTION ON CHLORPYRIFOS, FINALLY

Calling the action "a major step to improve safety for all Americans,"¹ the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced on June 8 that some significant uses of the organophosphate insecticide chlorpyrifos will be cancelled. After December 31, 2001, chlorpyrifos will not be sold for most indoor and outdoor residential uses; most uses in schools, parks, and other institutions; all uses on tomatoes; and uses on apple trees after fruit has begun to form.²

Chlorpyrifos, first registered in 1965,³ is currently the most widely used insecticide in the U.S.⁴ Estimated annual use is 24 million pounds, split evenly between agricultural and nonagricultural uses.

A number of chlorpyrifos uses will continue: use on an additional 110 food crops⁵ will not be restricted, use to control fire ants and mosquitos is unchanged, and termite treatments are on a slower phaseout schedule. Golf course use will also continue, as well as uses on roadway medians, but at a lower application rate than is currently allowed.²

EPA's decision to restrict use of chlorpyrifos is a result of the agency's evaluation of the insecticide under the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act. The act requires special protections for children and established an extra tenfold safety factor for EPA to use when doing pesticide risk assessments.²

In December, 1999, EPA released a preliminary risk assessment for chlorpyrifos, which was criticized because the children's safety factor was reduced from ten to three. EPA released a final risk assessment for chlorpyrifos June 8 in which the children's safety factor was restored to ten.⁶

EPA's decision to restore the children's safety factor was based on studies evaluated by the agency this spring. One new study showed that newborn laboratory animals were more susceptible to chlorpyrifos than adult animals at doses substantially lower than had been observed in earlier studies. Other studies showed that chlorpyrifos exposure caused structural alterations in developing brains, and that these effects were observed at all doses tested for which measurements were made.^{5,6}

Clearly, EPA's action restricting chlorpyrifos uses is important. However, it is shocking that EPA did not act sooner; chlorpyrifos has been in widespread use for nearly 35 years.

Although about half of chlorpyrifos use is agricultural, only a few of these uses of chlorpyrifos are affected by EPA's action. It thus fails to protect farmworkers who are occupationally exposed.

The announcement also raises serious questions about the other large families of nerve poisons that are commonly used as insecticides: carbamates (carbaryl, for example) and pyrethroids (permethrin, for example). If cancellation of chlorpyrifos uses just results in increased use of these other chemicals, many of the same risks remain. Implementation of nonchemical pest management techniques is the only long-term solution.

—Caroline Cox

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2. U.S. EPA. Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances. 2000. Chlorpyrifos revised risk assessment and agreement with registrants. Washington, DC, June. www.epa.gov/pesticides.
3. U.S. EPA. Office of Pesticide Programs. 1984. Guidance for the reregistration of pesticide products containing chlorpyrifos. Washington, DC, Sept. 28. p. 5.
4. Aspelin, A.L. and A. H. Grube. 1999. Pesticides industry sales and usage: 1996 and 1997 market estimates. U.S. EPA. Office of Pesticide Programs. Biological and Economic Analysis Div. Washington, D.C., Nov. Pp. 21-22.
5. U.S. EPA. Office of Pesticide Programs. Health Effects Division. 2000. Human health risk assessment: chlorpyrifos. www.epa.gov/pesticides.
6. U.S. EPA. Undated. Overview of chlorpyrifos revised risk assessment. www.epa.gov/pesticides.

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