

EMBARGOED UNTIL MAY 20, 2011, 11:00 am

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STATE FASTRACKS MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR LEGAL PROCESS FOR ADVANCE APPROVAL OF STATEWIDE PESTICIDE SPRAY PROGRAMS

Health & Environmental Groups Urge Alternative Consensus Planning for Safer Approach to Pests Based on Current Science

Press Briefing Scheduled:

When: Friday, May 20, 2011 10:00 am

Where: 436 14th Street, Ste. 200, Oakland, CA

Sacramento, CA --- The California Department of Food & Agriculture (CDFA) is rapidly moving to create a legal document that will lock in for decades to come the state's outdated approach to invasive pests, which has not changed since the notorious Medfly aerial malathion spraying during the 1970s. The statewide Pest Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (Pest PEIR) will cost taxpayers a minimum of \$3 – 4.5 million, and is intended to give advance approval for toxic treatments on short notice for unknown future pests, anywhere in the state.

Health and environmental groups are urging the state to instead undertake a consensus planning process, at an estimated cost of \$300,000, a fraction of the \$3 – 4.5 million Pest PEIR budget. Modeled after the successful 2010 Agricultural Vision Process conducted for CDFA, the "Invasives Vision" planning process would:

- modernize the state's approach to invasive species by capitalizing on cutting-edge UC research
- create invasive pest programs that are more efficient, effective, and supportive of farmers
- significantly reduce wide-scale pesticide use on farms, in neighborhoods & around schools
- minimize litigation, conflict, and public mistrust
- reduce costs to taxpayers

"For more than 30 years, the state has been quarantining farmers, spraying pesticides, and using other ecologically disruptive pest control methods that endanger ecosystems and public health," stated Nan Wishner of Stop the Spray East Bay. "These programs burden our farmers, especially small, organic farmers; and are costly, ineffective, and not based on current science. Forty percent of the state was under quarantine for invasive species last year, and CDFA has conducted 274 pest eradication projects since 1982 for the same 9 insects. We simply cannot afford to continue to battle invasive species this way," Wishner added.

"Pesticides are clearly linked to a profound array of chronic health disorders. Children are particularly affected because the amount of pesticides they absorb is much greater than adults as a result of children's unique physiology and behavior," stated Debbie Friedman, Chairperson for MOMS Advocating Sustainability (MOMAS). "The state's reliance on wide-area repeated chemical pest treatments intended to create virtual clouds of toxins is especially dangerous for children's health," Friedman said.

"New research shows that even minute amounts of pesticides can cause significant changes to our immune systems, brain development, as well as other serious health risks," stated Caroline Cox, Research Director for Center for Environmental Health. "It is very concerning that the state wants to obtain advance approval under California environmental law for outdated policies that allow pesticides to be sprayed repeatedly in our neighborhoods and on our food for years to come."

"Our coalition is asking the state government to use scarce tax dollars to develop policy solutions for pest management based upon solid, independent science, through a visioning process that brings stakeholders to the table, eliminates an expensive and conflictual legal process, and can result in a planning document that revolutionizes the state's invasive pest policies. The Invasives Vision Process is a planning approach whose time has come," said Paul Towers, State Director of Pesticide Watch.

"Under the California Environmental Quality Act, it would be impossible as a practical matter for CDFA to evaluate in a single EIR, as they are proposing, all health and environmental impacts of all programs for current and unknown future pests on all species and ecosystems under all conditions statewide," said attorney Keith Wagner, a partner in the environmental law firm Lippe Gaffney Wagner LLP. "This new PEIR continues the flawed approach of the apple moth PEIR, which is currently being challenged in court. The new Pest PEIR will cost far more and take much longer than CDFA plans, and is most likely to also end up stalled in court if CDFA does not seriously rethink its approach."

About Center for Environmental Health: CEH has a fifteen-year track record of protecting communities from the health impacts of toxic pollution and has previously uncovered lead and other toxic health threats to children and families from dozens of products and from environmental pollution. CEH also works with major industries and leaders in green business to promote healthier alternatives to toxic products and practices. www.ceh.org

About MOMAS (MOMS Advocating Sustainability): MOMAS is a group of mothers and families committed to creating healthy communities for children by reducing the use of household and environmental toxins. www.momasunite.org

About Pesticide Watch: Since 1991, Pesticide Watch Education Fund has worked side-by-side with Californians to prevent pesticide exposure, promote local farming and build healthier communities. www.pesticidewatch.org

About Stop the Spray East Bay: Stop the Spray East Bay's more than 500 members promote science-based non-toxic approaches to agriculture and to invasive species programs with a focus on protecting human and environmental health. www.eastbay.stopthespray.org

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