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Item ID Number 05233

Not Scanned

Author

Corporate Author

Report/Article Title Press Releases regarding EPA Review of 2,4,5-T, April 12, 1978

Journal/Book Title

Year 0000

Month/Day

Color

Number of Images 0

Description Notes One press release by the EPA and one by Citizens National Forest Coalition.



Environmental News

O'Neill (202) 755-0344

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 1978

2,4,5-T PESTICIDE BEING REVIEWED BY EPA

A weed and brush killing pesticide commonly used on forests, rangeland, rice paddies, and rights-of-way areas such as highways and electric lines is being reviewed by the Environmental Protection Agency to determine whether these uses should continue, be restricted, or stopped altogether.

The pesticide is 2,4,5-T herbicide, produced in the U.S. since 1948 but the subject of controversy in recent years. Environmentalists contend the compound may threaten birth defects and cancer. EPA recently received some 450 letters from citizens and environmental groups, such as the Citizens Against Toxic Sprays, protesting use of the chemical.

On the other hand, many pesticide, agriculture and forestry officials argue the weed killer is not a serious hazard but the only effective, economical weapon for controlling unwanted plant life.

Of special concern is a chemical contaminant sometimes found in 2,4,5-T products called "dioxin" or "TCDD." This is one of the most toxic chemicals known, capable of killing laboratory animals in extremely small (parts per billion) amounts. Dioxin is created as a by-product during the 2,4,5-T manufacturing process.

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EPA FORM 1510-1 (REV. 6-72)

Producers of the herbicide have reduced dioxin levels from 30 to 40 parts per million (ppm) in the late 1960's to less than the current EPA requirement of 0.1 ppm, greatly reducing the potential hazard.

"EPA's investigation of 2,4,5-T and dioxin mainly will concern their potential for causing cancer or birth defects in people over long periods of time," said EPA Deputy Administrator Barbara Blum. "The Agency does not think current use of the chemical poses an imminent or emergency threat to people or the environment."

EPA's review of the chemical is technically called a "rebuttable presumption against registration." This means that the Agency has found scientific evidence of a potential health hazard from the pesticide but that it is giving producers and users of the vegetation killer the chance to rebut this evidence and argue economic benefits. After this has occurred, the Agency will decide whether the compound is reasonably safe as used, whether additional limitations are needed, or whether it should be removed from the market.

This process of commenting upon the chemical and reviewing information received may take a year. In the meantime, 2,4,5-T may continue to be sold and used.

EPA began the review of the herbicide's risks and benefits for the following reasons:

--The pesticide and its dioxin contaminant have killed fetuses or caused birth defects, such as cleft palate, among laboratory mice, rats, hamsters and birds in tests by the National Institutes of Health and other researchers.

--2,4,5-T and dioxin have caused leukemia or lung, liver or other tumors among mice and rats in studies conducted by the National Institutes of Health, Dow Chemical, and others.

--EPA calculations show that "an ample margin of safety" may not exist for persons applying the pesticide or people exposed to aircraft spraying of it.

"Findings of birth defects and cancerous tumors among laboratory animals exposed to 2,4,5-T indicate that it may cause the same problems among people," noted Blum. "We're thrashing out the pro's and con's of the compound in a public review before deciding whether regulatory action is called for."

EPA estimated that some five million pounds of 2,4,5-T were applied in the U.S. in 1976 principally for brush control

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on livestock grazing land and on rights-of-way areas such as highway ground, utility lines, and railroad tracks. Lesser uses include brush control in forests and weed control in rice--the only crop treatment.

The principal makers of 2,4,5-T are Dow Chemical, Midland, Michigan; Thompson-Hayward Chemical Co., Kansas City, Kansas and Transvall, Inc., Jacksonville, Arkansas.

In 1970, the U.S. Department of Agriculture stopped the use of 2,4,5-T around homes, parks and other recreational areas, and in lakes and waterways primarily to protect women of child-bearing age from a possible birth defects threat.

In 1974, EPA cancelled hearings on whether remaining uses of the herbicide should be stopped because of problems in measuring dioxin residues in people, wildlife and the environment. Since then the Agency has found parts-per-trillion levels of dioxin in a few samples of beef cattle, birds and other wildlife. The Agency intends to analyze women's breast milk, rice and fish for residues.

Persons interested in comments on the risks or benefits of 2,4,5-T should submit their views by June 5 to EPA, Office of Pesticide Program, Technical Services Division, (WH-569) 401 M Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20460.

The notice will appear soon in the Federal Register.

4/12/78

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITIZENS NATIONAL FOREST COALITION CALLS UPON THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY TO IMMEDIATELY HALT THE SALES AND PRODUCTION OF ALL PRODUCTS CONTAMINATED WITH TCDD DIOXIN, THE MOST DEADLY CHEMICAL EVER SYNTHESIZED.

At a meeting set for 10 a.m., Thursday, April 13, the Citizens National Forest Coalition will ask Ed Johnson, Deputy Administrator, E.P.A., that an immediate ban be placed on all products that are contaminated with any amount of TCDD Dioxin, such as 2,4,5-T herbicide

2,4,5-T herbicide, manufactured primarily by DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY, attained notoriety when it was sprayed in Vietnam during the war. "Agent Orange", a 50/50 combination of 2,4,5 T and 2,4-D, was banned from military use when it was found to cause deformities and birth defects in laboratory tests. 2,4,5-T is one of many common consumer products contaminated with TCDD Dioxin, the most deadly chemical ever produced by man.

Recent evidence shows 2,4,5-T to also cause cancer. 2,4,5-T is extensively used here in the United States; every year an area slightly larger than the five million acres sprayed in Vietnam is sprayed here.

Despite the assurances of DOW, there is no safe level of TCDD Dioxin

*Tests by Dr. James R. Allen at the University of Wisconsin have shown that 500 parts-per-trillion of TCDD Dioxin fed daily to rhesus monkeys will kill half of the animals in 9 months or less. 5 parts per-trillion of TCDD Dioxin administered to rats will produce tumors

*In late 1976 Dr. Matthew Meselson of Harvard tested samples of human mothers milk from areas where the Forest Service has sprayed 2,4,5-T. TCDD Dioxin was found in the milk of nursing mothers.

*A recent scientific study by Dougherty and Piotrowska at Florida State University found that one third of the FSU dorm residents tested had 2,4,5-T in their urine, and that 2,4,5-T was in bread and rice purchased at local markets.

*On July 10, 1976, an explosion at a 2,4,5-T manufacturing plant released a cloud of TCDD Dioxin that has left the town of Seveso, Italy uninhabitable, and the residents poisoned.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: JOHN STAUBER OR ERIC JANSSON, CO-CHAIRS, CITIZENS NATIONAL FOREST COALITION, 620 C STREET SE, WASHINGTON, DC, 20003. (202) 543-4312

CNFC was formed in February, 1978, by citizens from 20 states who oppose the spraying of 2,4,5-T herbicide by the U.S. Forest Service. CNFC encourages the implementation of non-chemical, labor intensive methods of vegetation management.