Contra Costa County Moves One Step Closer to Regulating Dangerous Pesticides

Martinez, CA — Over two-dozen community members, from toddlers to the elderly, along with numerous health and environmental organizations, converged at a Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors in late summer to oppose the continued use of toxic pesticides on County property. After listening to testimony from community members and environmental leaders, Supervisors Philipo and Glover instructed the County staff to draft a new law to regulate pesticide use. “Contra Costa County needs to step up to the plate and dramatically reduce pesticide use,” said Susan Jun Fish, MPH, Director of Parents for a Safer Environment (PSE). “The Board of Supervisors has moved the County one step closer to reshaping the way we use chemicals on our lawns, landscapes and buildings.”

Pesticide Watch
1107 9th Street, Suite 601
Sacramento, CA 95814
www.pesticidewatch.org

Address Service Requested

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Mothers Advance New Pesticide Laws in Marin County

Marin County, CA — While many Bay Area residents went back to life as usual after the postponement of the aerial spray plan for the light brown apple moth, Mothers of Marin Against the Spray (MOMAS) knew that there was, and will continue to be, threats facing the health and safety of their children. MOMAS began in April 2008 as an effort by four Marin mothers to organize and prevent the State of California’s planned aerial pesticide spraying program to eradicate the light brown apple moth. Since then, MOMAS membership has grown to over 500 concerned parents.

In January 2009, MOMAS began to work from the grassroots level to strengthen Marin County’s Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Ordinance. This pesticide law regulates the use of toxins and pesticides on Marin County property, including parks and bike paths. The original law was drafted in 1998 and was groundbreaking at the time. To the dismay of many, the final revised draft of the Ordinance eliminated important pesticide reduction requirements established by the original Ordinance, and failed to vigorously protect Marin’s children and its most vulnerable populations from the inherent dangers of pesticide exposure.

A MEMORIAL: In Memory of Roberta J. In support of the Spray Marin, has successfully collects hundreds of petitions to deliver to county supervisors, turned dozens of people out to public hearings, and have made the case loud and clear in the media that children’s health and well-being should be put first. As a result of the groundswell of public pressure MOMAS created, the Supervisors are re-considering the pesticide laws and will likely take even more progressive steps by the year’s end, resulting in the widespread reduction of pesticides across the county.

A MAMAS strong community member informs another mother about the county’s pesticide laws at a local farmers market.

A Note to Our Members

In early August I stood with members of Pesticide-Free Sacramento, the City of Sacramento Parks Department, and a City Councilmember and announced the pilot of the first pesticide-free park in the City. It was an exciting moment. This coalition of advocates and government officials has commitment to fundamentally reforming pesticide use in the State’s Capital. And just in time.

In the past few months, more and more studies have highlighted the links between Parkinson’s disease and pesticides, while others have highlighted the increasing load of pesticides found in the Sacramento Delta, a source of drinking water and fisheries for the state.

The good news is that groups like Pesticide-Free Sacramento are working to change pesticide applications, laws at the local, regional and, in some cases, state and federal levels, to reduce the burden of pesticides in California. With Fall upon us, one of the heaviest seasons for lawn care, pesticide application, join Pesticide Watch and local community groups in efforts to reform the use of these chemicals. Learn more about these efforts in this newsletter.

Sincerely,

Paul Schramski
State Director

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Urban Ag Day Comes to Sacramento

Sacramento, CA — July 11th officially marked Urban Ag Day in Sacramento. Sacramento City Councilmembers cheered as Pesticide Watch worked with Environment and Agriculture Taskforce (EAT) Sacramento and Slow Food Sacramento to pass a resolution honoring local food production, while citing the need for increased access to healthy food.

“Building healthy communities requires access to healthy food,” said Jaclyn Hopkins, coordinator of EAT Sacramento.

“We need more green thumbs and green thumb jobs to fix our unhealthy food crisis.”

— Jaclyn Hopkins, EAT Sacramento

Central Coast Residents Tackle New Strawberry Pesticide

Monterey County, CA — After receiving considerable pressure from communities and legislators across the state, pesticide regulators have reinstated the scientific review of methyl isodide, a fumigant slated for use on California’s strawberry fields. Facing the phase-out of the widely used methyl bromide under international treaties, agribusiness and big chemical companies began pressuring Governor Schwarzenegger and the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR) to fast-track the approval of methyl isodide this summer. Unfortunately, methyl isodide has been connected to a myriad of health problems including cancer, thyroid disease, and abnormal fetal development. It is also known to escape into nearby groundwater wells and the atmosphere, leaving neighboring residents at an alarmingly high exposure rate.

In late July, Senator Mark Leno (San Francisco and Assemblyman Bill Monning (Monterey) co-authored a letter to both the Governor and CDPR on behalf of thirty-three legislators, expressing concern over the approval of methyl isodide as a widely-sprayed fumigant. The letter was followed by thousands of phone calls and emails from concerned residents. Quickly thereafter, CDPR announced they would continue to review methyl isodide as a replacement fumigant. In the coming months, activists from across the state, but especially Monterey County, will continue to challenge the use of the new, toxic pesticide.

“Scientific and community concerns will prevail,” said Marilyn Lynds, spokesperson for the Moss Landing Heights Neighborhood. “We will keep methyl isodide out of California and move towards safer strawberry production.”

Spotlight: The Toxic Site Detective

Santa Clara, CA — It doesn’t surprise you to learn that Kirk Vartan grew up in New York City. He is straightforward, talks quickly, and loves good pizza. What might surprise you is the dedication, stamina and drive this pizza parlor owner, who started in his corporate suit and tied for a white apron, gives to protecting democracy and the public voice.

Vartan, along with about fifteen other Santa Clara residents, started SaveBAREC after learning that one of the few open spaces left in Santa Clara County was about to be taken out of the public domain, sold off, and privatized. As Vartan dug deeper, he uncovered decades of pesticide testing, soil contamination, and illness surrounding the property.

When the group brought their concerns to the local city council, they were astonished as their voices were overpowered by big money. Big business. Vartan and the group continue to mobilize at the grassroots level, building up the public support to pressure the company and the State to do the right thing and properly clean up the pesticide residue and preserve the space for public use. “It is important that citizens stand up to local government when it loses focus. We are a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This is our democracy and we are all empowered to make sure it is working for us,” Vartan said.

New Film Highlights The Dangers of Lawn Chemicals

San Francisco, CA — Through tireless organizing, one Canadian activist and her neighbors launched a national movement to reform pesticide use. A new film by American organic lawn care guru Paul Tukey highlights the struggles and triumph of the movement that eventually resulted in major changes in local and national laws over pesticide use.

Throughout the film, Tukey and Green ChemLawn, North America’s largest lawn care provider, desperately tries to stop the changes to laws, launching an all-out campaign to maintain conventional forms of lawn care. In the end, the company fails to convince voters and lawmakers that pesticides were required for lawn care, so they are largely banned in Canada—something the U.S. has yet to achieve.

Elizabeth Martin-Craig, a San Francisco-based Pesticide Watch organizer featured in the film says, “The story of Hudson is living proof that when people come together and make their voices heard, they can triumph over well-funded industry lobbyists.”

Contact Us

Is your neighborhood threatened by pesticide pollution? Are your government officials or company executives not addressing these issues in a timely and effective manner? If so, Pesticide Watch Education Fund and our staff can come to your community and help you. Please contact us at 916.551.1883 or info@pesticidewatch.org.


Also making an appearance in the film are Dr. Alan Greene, a California pediatrician, and Assemblywoman Fiona Ma from San Francisco.

For more information, or to screen the film in your neighborhood or lawn, email info@pesticidewatch.org. Visit our website: pesticidewatch.org for upcoming screenings.