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Senate Committee Unanimously Passes Resolution Opposing Apple Moth Aerial Spray

USDA Expert Questions Effectiveness of Spraying

Sacramento, CA – In a show of unusual bipartisan support, the Senate Environmental Quality Committee today unanimously passed a resolution by San Francisco Senator Carole Migden calling for a moratorium on aerial spraying for the light brown apple moth (LBAM).

Retired United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) expert on pheromone-based pest management testified in support of the resolution that “no eradication of a pest species with only mating disruption has ever been accomplished.” Dr. Chambers went on to say, “Mating disruption alone is not appropriate for California’s situation, and probably never will be,” and, while he is “fully in favor of eradicating emergent pest populations in California where it is necessary and feasible,” he does “not support the aerial application of pheromone to attempt eradication of LBAM.”

Chambers served as science advisor to the California Department of Agriculture (CDFA) during the medfly eradication program that began in the 1970s in San Jose, which relied on aerial pesticide spraying. Summing up the lessons of the medfly program, Chambers testified, “We learned in San Jose that justification, appropriate technology, safety, and proven efficacy must be convincing. Certainly, the public’s present feeling that they are being subjected to an unwarranted, unsafe, and untested procedure should be more thoroughly addressed than it so far has been. I believe the LBAM project should be challenged on all these issues, but I am particularly concerned that the issue of efficacy has not been sufficiently questioned.”

Chambers concluded his testimony regarding the LBAM program: “The political and social sensitivities of an unconvincing project are not being adequately addressed.”

Pesticide Watch State Director Paul Schramski, who also testified in support of the resolution, said “The legislature has demonstrated that sound science trumps agency budget. In the face of pressure to eradicate a perceived pest, California legislators have stood up for community concerns and called for the scientific need for pesticide spraying.”

Schramski noted that the resolution is consistent with resolutions passed by 21 cities and counties and more than 50 local, state, and national health, environmental, and other groups opposing the spray.

Last Thursday, Governor Schwarzenegger announced plans to conduct safety tests on pesticides proposed for LBAM aerial spraying this summer. Health and environmental advocates object that the tests announced are only of short-term exposure.

Caroline Cox, Research Director at the Center for Environmental Health commented that the toxicity tests that the governor announced “do not include any testing for important long-term health problems like cancer, birth defects, or genetic damage. Neither do they include testing for many of the short-term health problems experienced after last fall’s spraying like asthma and headaches.”

“These tests do not address the repeated, continuous exposure from regular spraying of a time-released pesticide that CDFA plans for 7 counties starting this summer,” said Nan Wishner, Chair of the Albany Integrated Pest Management Task Force. “Truly comprehensive testing would also study the effects of spraying on susceptible populations, particularly children and the elderly.”

The Senate Environmental Quality Committee Members voting for the resolution were: Senator Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto), Senator George Runner (R-Victorville), Senator Samuel Aanestad (R-Chico), Senator Ellen Corbett (D-San Leandro), Senator Dean Florez (D-Bakersfield), Senator Sheila Kuehl (D-Los Angeles), and Senator Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach). Senators Simitian and Corbett also signed on as coauthors of Senator Migden’s resolution.

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Pesticide Watch is a statewide public health and environmental group that works side-by-side with communities to clean up pesticide pollution and prevent pesticide exposure.