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## Trump administration rejects ban on harmful insecticide, dozens of farmworkers get sick

Chlorpyrifos is linked to neurotoxic symptoms like nausea, dizziness, and confusion.



In this May 13, 2004, file photo, a foreman watches workers pick fruit in an orchard in Arvin, Calif. CREDIT: AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File

More than 50 farm workers in California became sick from pesticide drift, Kern Golden Empire reported, one month after a controversial pesticide was deemed safe to use by the Trump administration.

On May 5, workers harvesting cabbage on a farm near Bakersfield were exposed to a "pesticide odor" from mandarin orchards in the west sprayed with Vulcan, an organophosphate-based chemical. The active ingredient in Vulcan is chlorpyrifos, a chemical linked to human health problems manufactured by Dow AgroSciences, a division of Dow Chemical. Chlorpyrifos was slated to be banned by the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency under the Obama administration.

Approximately 12 people with symptoms of vomiting and nausea were decontaminated, but 11 of those 12 refused any further treatment, according to an incident log on the Kern County Fire Department webpage. One person was taken to the hospital while more than half of the farm workers left before medical personnel arrived on scene. The Kern County Fire Department, Kern County Environmental Health and Hazmat responded to the area for a mass decontamination.

"I'm not pointing fingers or saying it was done incorrectly. It was just an unfortunate thing the way it was drifted," Efron Zavalza, Supervisor and Food Safety Specialist at Dan Andrews Farms where the incident occurred, told the publication. "The wind came and pushed everything east and you know we were caught in the path."

"Anybody that was exposed, that was here today, we encourage them to seek medical attention immediately. Don't wait. Particularly if you're suffering from any symptoms. Whether it's nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, seek medical attention immediately," Michelle Corson, Public Relations Officer, Kern County Public Health, said.

Chlorpyrifos— a widely-used organophosphate insecticide in use for over 50 years— is used on a variety of crops like oranges, apples, cherries, grapes, and broccoli. It can cause neurotoxic symptoms in humans like nausea, dizziness, and confusion. When exposed to high dosages, humans can suffer from respiratory paralysis or death. A study by researchers at Columbia University found that exposure was linked to brain function and lower IQ among children. For years, environmental groups have pressured the EPA to look into the correlation between pesticide usage and problems that could affect workers on an organic and cellular level.

Dow Chemical gave \$1 million to Trump's inauguration, now wants pesticide risk study buried

The chemical manufacturer also pushed for a potentially dangerous

insecticide not to be banned.

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During the Obama administration, EPA scientists recommended taking chlorpyrifos off the market. Despite the scientific evidence, new EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt rejected the ban on chlorpyrifos on the grounds that the agency needs to "provide regulatory certainty" for the thousands of U.S. farms that rely on chlorpyrifos. Dow Chemical donated \$1 million to fund President Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony. In a letter to the Trump administration sent in April, Dow Chemical asked the administration to "set aside" and ignore research showing that the pesticide could be harmful to endangered species.

POLITICS

# E.P.A. Chief, Rejecting Agency's Science, Chooses Not to Ban Insecticide

By ERIC LIPTON MARCH 29, 2017

WASHINGTON — Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, moved late on Wednesday to reject the scientific conclusion of the agency's own chemical safety experts who under the Obama administration recommended that one of the nation's most widely used insecticides be permanently banned at farms nationwide because of the harm it potentially causes children and farm workers.

The ruling by Mr. Pruitt, in one of his first formal actions as the nation's top environmental official, rejected a petition filed a decade ago by two environmental groups that had asked that the agency ban all uses of chlorpyrifos. The chemical was banned in 2000 for use in most household settings, but still today is used at about 40,000 farms on about 50 different types of crops, ranging from almonds to apples.

Late last year, and based in part on research conducted at Columbia University, E.P.A. scientists concluded that exposure to the chemical that has been in use since 1965 was potentially causing significant health consequences. They included learning and memory declines, particularly among farm workers and young children who may be exposed through drinking water and other sources.

But Dow Chemical, which sells the product under the trade name Lorsban, along with farm groups that use it, had argued that the science demonstrating that chlorpyrifos caused such harm is inconclusive — especially when properly used to kill

crop-spoiling insects.

An E.P.A. scientific review panel made up of academic experts last July also had raised questions about some of the conclusions the chemical safety staff had reached. That led the staff to revise the way it had justified its findings of harm, although the agency employees as of late last year still concluded that the chemical should be banned.

Mr. Pruitt, in an announcement issued Wednesday night, said the agency needed to study the science more.

“We need to provide regulatory certainty to the thousands of American farms that rely on chlorpyrifos, while still protecting human health and the environment,” Mr. Pruitt said in his statement. “By reversing the previous administration’s steps to ban one of the most widely used pesticides in the world, we are returning to using sound science in decision-making — rather than predetermined results.”

The United States Department of Agriculture, which works close with the nation’s farmers, supported Mr. Pruitt’s action.

“It means that this important pest management tool will remain available to growers, helping to ensure an abundant and affordable food supply for this nation,” Sheryl Kunickis, director of the U.S.D.A. Office of Pest Management Policy, said in a statement Wednesday.

Dow Agrosiences, the division that sells the product, also praised the ruling, calling it in a statement “the right decision for farmers who, in about 100 countries, rely on the effectiveness of chlorpyrifos to protect more than 50 crops.”

But Jim Jones, who ran the chemical safety unit at the E.P.A. for five years, and spent more than 20 years working there until he left the agency in January when President Trump took office, said he was disappointed by Mr. Pruitt’s action.

“They are ignoring the science that is pretty solid,” Mr. Jones said, adding that he believed the ruling would put farm workers and exposed children at unnecessary risk.

The ruling is, in some ways, more consequential than the higher profile move by Mr. Trump on Tuesday to order the start of rolling back Obama administration rules related to coal-burning power plants and climate change.

In rejecting the pesticide ban, Mr. Pruitt took what is known as a “final agency action” on the question of the safety and use of chlorpyrifos, suggesting that the matter would not likely be revisited until 2022, the next time the E.P.A. is formally required to re-evaluate the safety of the pesticide.

Mr. Pruitt’s move was immediately condemned by environmental groups, which said it showed that the Trump administration cared more about catering to the demands of major corporate players, like Dow Chemical, than the health and safety of families nationwide.

“We have a law that requires the E.P.A. to ban pesticides that it cannot determine are safe, and the E.P.A. has repeatedly said this pesticide is not safe,” said Patti Goldman, managing attorney at Earthjustice, a San Francisco-based environmental group that serves as the legal team for the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Pesticide Action Network of North America, which filed the petition in 2007 to ban the product.

The agency had been under court order to issue a ruling on the petition by Friday. The environmental groups intend to return to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco to ask judges to order the agency to “take action to protect children from this pesticide” Ms. Goldman said on Wednesday.

***Correction: March 29, 2017***

An earlier version of this article misstated part of the name of an environmental advocacy group. It is the Natural Resources Defense Council, not the National Resources Defense Council.

A version of this article appears in print on March 30, 2017, on Page A21 of the New York edition with the headline: E.P.A. Chief Won't Ban Insecticide Thought to Be Risky.