

2,4-D Escapes Federal Axe...For Now

Two states and Canada pursue restrictions

By Shawnee Hoover

In June 2005, EPA reregistered 2,4-D (2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid) amid much controversy. Public interest groups argue that EPA should increase the protection of toddlers, designate 2,4-D as a 'possible' carcinogen, and close the gaps of missing information. In the end, EPA reregistered 2,4-D much as the chemical industry, led by Dow Chemical Company, urged. Still missing is data to clarify the chemical's potential impact on the developing brain and nervous system, the endocrine and immune systems, and risks posed by inhalation.

The infamous herbicide 2,4-D, first manufactured in 1947, is one of the most widely used toxic pesticides in the world. Residential use of 2,4-D on lawns, which accounts for 15 to 18 percent of all use in the U.S., is 8-11 million pounds per year – enough to fill some 23,000 18-wheel tanker trucks.

2,4-D gained notoriety as one-half of the formulation of Agent Orange – the pesticide used to defoliate jungles during the Vietnam War and linked to subsequent cases of leukemia, reproductive problems and other health effects. Some chemical lawn companies removed 2,4-D from their arsenal in the 1990's after epidemiological studies by the National Cancer Institute linked 2,4-D to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

In 1988, manufacturers of 2,4-D, now just Dow Chemical and a few others, formed the 2,4-D Industry Task Force in response to Congress requirement that old chemicals be reregistered to up-to-date standards. Since then, the Task Force has spent over \$34 million on research and lobbyists to convince the world that 2,4-D is harmless.

The EPA decision

In its 2005 decision, EPA did reduce the *allowed* homeowner application rate by 25 percent, from 2.0 lbs to 1.5 lbs. Even with the reduction however, toddlers are still precariously balanced on EPA's hypothetical line of reasonable risk.



EPA also left 2,4-D's cancer classification as 'nonclassifiable,' or 'Class D,' and sidestepped 2,4-D's contamination with dioxin – a known carcinogen. The 'Class D' descriptor is used when data are judged inadequate or conflicting.

At the urging of public interest groups, EPA finally reviewed scores of independent, peer-reviewed

cancer studies, but was unmoved since none of them "definitively linked" 2,4-D exposure to cancer. Science rarely delivers a definitive link, and regulatory decisions are expected to be based on the weight of evidence.

Though the EPA reregistration of 2,4-D is a victory for the 2,4-D Task Force, controversy still surrounds the herbicide. Two states and a large part of Canada are taking their own measures in response to 2,4-D's potential to cause developmental effects in fetuses, infants and children. Such effects could result in neurological damage, birth defects, immune system damage, or psychological or behavioral deficits.

State and international actions

- The California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) has stated its intention to list 2,4-D as a reproductive/developmental toxicant on its list of chemicals known to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity. The list is influential and used by other states and countries to better interpret chemical toxicity. CalEPA cites the same developmental studies that the federal EPA reviewed, but concludes that more is needed to protect infants and children. The Task Force is wrangling with the agency, but CalEPA is expected to proceed with the listing.
- In Canada, over 70 municipalities, the majority of which are in Quebec, have banned the aesthetic use of toxic lawn pesticides. The provincial government of Quebec, with a population of 7.5 million people, has proposed to ban both the use and the sale of 20 pesticides in 212 pesticide products. On the chopping block is 2,4-D. Reportedly, the Task Force has descended upon Quebec with a vengeance. Public officials will probably withstand the pressure and proceed, particularly if CalEPA moves forward with its listing of 2,4-D as a developmental toxicant.
- The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is proposing to increase the protection of infants and children from 2,4-D and 85 other chemicals in drinking water. MDH's changes would lower the maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 2,4-D in drinking water from EPA's 70 parts per billion (ppb) to 7 ppb. The primary justification for the reduction is that the current MCL is based on the daily water intake of an average adult and not that of an infant, which intakes up to six times more than an adult. The 2,4-D Task Force argues that any deviation from EPA methodology is unjustified.

Your letter of support to the states and Canada can help the officials stand up to the 2,4-D Task Force. Contact Beyond Pesticides for more information.