Metam-sodium applicators now must be certified, EPA reports

All individuals associated with the use of the pesticide metam-sodium must now wear protective clothing.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the principal registrants of the pesticide metam-sodium have agreed to implement an information requirement. Use around the home will be prohibited unless applied by a certified applicator.

The requirement is based on EPA’s review of animal studies, which show that exposure of individuals (particularly pregnant women) under current use practices may pose a risk of birth defects in the offspring.

Metam-sodium, registered since 1954, is a fumigant used before planting as a pesticide to control weeds, nematodes, fungi, bacteria and insects in the soil. The primary uses include agriculture and lawn grasses, flowers, fruit trees, grapevines and nursery stock. Approximately seven million to 12 million pounds are used annually, nearly half in agriculture.

EPA’s review of the studies was prompted by the July 14 spill of thousands of gallons of metam-sodium into the Sacramento River near Dunsmuir, Calif.

“The actions we are announcing are primarily precautionary,” said William K. Reilly, EPA administrator. The two developmental toxicity studies on animals, which resulted in the protective measures being taken, are not considered to be fully adequate to fulfill EPA’s requirements for reregistration.

However, the agency does consider the studies useful to provide estimates of possible risk from exposure to this chemical.

Under terms of the agreement:

• Mixers, loaders, applicators or any other persons who may come into direct contact with this pesticide will be required to wear properly fitting respirators; body covering, which includes long sleeves and long pants; and chemical resistant gloves and boots.

• Workers entering treated fields within 48 hours following application will be required to wear chemical resistant footwear and body covering including long sleeves and long pants.

Respirators and chemical resistant gloves are to be immediately available and used by these workers if they are likely to come into direct contact with the pesticide.

Registrants of metam-sodium products included in the agreement are ICI Americas Inc. of Wilmington, Del.; Amvac Chemical Co. of Los Angeles; Backman Labs Inc. of Memphis, Tenn.; Oregon-California Chemicals Inc. of Junction City, Ore.; and UCB Chemicals Corp. of Norfolk, Va. These registrants account for well over 90 percent of metam-sodium production.

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