

# EPA Okays Phaseout Of Methyl Bromide

By Ron Smith

Methyl bromide has been added to the Environmental Protection Agency's "hit list" and will be phased out by the year 2000.

Former EPA Administrator William K. Riley announced the phaseout on his last day in office, adding the soil fumigant and agricultural chemical to a list of materials linked to ozone depletion.

Riley said the action was justified under The Clean Air Act Amendment of 1990 which requires EPA to phase out production and import of five ozone depleters: CFCs, halons, carbon tetrachloride, methyl chloroform (all class I substances) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons or HCFCs (class II). The Amendments also gave EPA the responsibility to add other ozone depleters to the list.

Losing methyl bromide could pose a hardship on the turf industry, says Auburn University Extension turf specialist Coleman Ward. "Methyl bromide has been a lifesaver for many years, and we don't have anything else that has been used much in turf. We don't have a tried-and-true substitute."

Ward said sod farmers often use methyl bromide in certified turf fields to eliminate noxious weeds and other pests. "Sod probably accounts for the largest volume of use," Ward

said. "But the fumigant also is used extensively for golf green construction or renovation. Normally, contractors will fumigate the green complex to kill weeds, stem pieces from turfgrass, insects and nematodes. Golf course construction and renovation will be hampered by the loss."

Ward said he had never known of anyone being harmed by methyl bromide, although it is very toxic.

Carlton Lane, with the EPA public affairs office in Atlanta, said methyl bromide has been closely scrutinized because of its link to ozone depletion. "That characteristic puts it under the Clean Air Act."

Florida and California are the biggest users of methyl bromide, according to EPA.

In addition to turf, uses include fumigation for fruit and vegetable crop seedbeds. It also is used for tobacco transplant beds.

The EPA proposal allows companies to produce certain ozone depleters in excess of EPA allowance if necessary to supply basic domestic needs of developing countries, under Article 5 of the Montreal Protocol. Article 5 countries have a grace period until 2010 to meet production and import phaseout commitments.

American manufacturers, however, must provide adequate assurance to EPA that developing countries will not re-export those ozone depleters to another country, according to an EPA press release.

The rule may also require labels warning the public that a product contains an ozone depleting substance. And states may supersede EPA rules to set more stringent regulations for ozone depleting substances.

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