

HOT TOPICS

Clinton, EPA detail pesticide control plan

WASHINGTON— The Clinton administration wants to establish stricter testing standards for agricultural pesticides.

Environmental Protection Agency director Carol Browner also says the agency would examine sources of pesticide exposure, from playgrounds to drinking water.

A proposed bill would:

- Require comprehensive studies of the pesticide levels in food eaten by infants and children.
- Set a single health-based, scientific standard for all pesticides used on all foods, covering all health risks.
- Decree a seven-year deadline for banning pesticides that cannot be proven safe.
- Reduce pesticide use by helping farmers institute alternative methods of pest control.

The bill is a response to a recent USDA study which found pesticide residues on more than 60 percent of fruits and vegetables sampled. Most of those residues, however, were below federally established tolerance levels.

The bill, as proposed by the Clinton administration, would define a pesticide residue as unacceptable if it causes one excess case of cancer per million cases.

If passed, the legislation would change how the government determines the cancer risk from exposure to control products and require that infants and children receive special protection because, according to the bill, they eat more fruits and vegetables in proportion to their body weight.

Additionally, the legislation would scrutinize control product use around public grounds and monitor pesticide

residues in drinking water more fiercely.

The legislation would widen the parameters by which it judges product safety, requiring new levels of testing for possible effects on the brain, reproductive system and immune system. A "negligible risk" standard would mean the product could only be used in amounts where there is a "reasonable certainty of no harm."

The bill was carefully worded to enlist the support of the public—with the stated concern for "infants and children," and by saying the bill is meant to "ease the burden" on farmers by providing them with non-chemical means of pest control.

But the bill would also increase the amount of paperwork farmers do to document their chemical use.

Ripple effect—The turf and ornamental chemicals market would certainly be affected by the legislation, as many agricultural control products are used in the specialty chemical industry.

Allen James, executive director of Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), says the level of scrutiny the administration wants to impose on product testing is not new, but certainly would be more extensive,

"These products undergo 120 tests,

including testing in those areas," says James, "however, the procedures and science are not in place (for the higher level of testing). The current tests cover most of those areas adequately."

"If the new law goes into effect and imposes a larger range of testing," says James, "the EPA will be further burdened. There's no way it could accomplish the testing" (within the seven-year deadline).

According to James, the agency is having enough trouble as it is, trying to reregister products under existing standards.

The Clinton proposal will compete with two other pending bills. One, a less-restrictive bill, has the support of the food industry and American Farm Bureau Federation, and has a majority of support in the House and 20 sponsors in the Senate.



James: Proposed bill would burden EPA and industry.

2,4-D/cancer link 'weak' says EPA panel

WASHINGTON—An EPA-sanctioned panel says that existing studies of the herbicide 2,4-D have not demonstrated a cause-and-effect link with cancer, according to a report by the Industry Task Force on 2,4-D Research Data.

The group convened in April of 1993 to evaluate the carcinogenicity of 2,4-D after studies suggested a cancer link. It issued its latest report in late March of this year.

The EPA must now consider these latest finding in evaluating the need for further regulatory action on 2,4-D.

More than 4000 studies have been made of 2,4-D since 1948.

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