

WINDOW ON AGRICULTURE

Office of the Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner

John Westoby
Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer

133 Aviation Blvd., Ste. 110, Santa Rosa, CA 95403
Phone (707) 565-2371
www.sonoma-county.org

March 2004

Marilyn Vernon and Suzanne Ostrom

PESTICIDE ILLNESS SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

(Excerpts from DPR's website)

California's pesticide regulatory program has tracked pesticide-related illnesses since the early 1970s. Illness records help the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) document and evaluate situations in which pesticides cause injury and illness. The Pesticide Illness Surveillance Program helps DPR reevaluate pesticide registrations and modify use practices to enhance protection for people and the environment. Scientists at DPR and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) also use the information to improve safety information on pesticide labels. Illness investigations help focus enforcement attention on potential problem areas for all types of pesticides, which include insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, fumigants, rodenticides, repellents, disinfectants, and any other substance intended to control harmful organisms.

Since 1971, California law has required that doctors contact their local health department whenever they suspect an illness or injury is related to pesticide exposure. The health department then alerts the county agricultural commissioner and also completes a Pesticide Illness Report. County agricultural commissioners investigate all cases within their jurisdictions, whether identified by physician reports or DPR's review of workers' compensation reports. DPR provides commissioners with instruction, guidance, oversight, and technical support.

When our office receives a Pesticide Illness Report we assign it to a biologist to investigate.

The investigating biologist gathers information on the pesticide involved and on the activity and situation at the time of the injury or illness. The biologist looks for things such as the proper use of the pesticide, proper use of personal protective equipment, training of employees, etc. Fines and other penalties may be assessed if circumstances warrant.

Depending upon the circumstances and severity of the incident, DPR may also take its own enforcement actions to protect public health and the environment. Commissioners send their completed reports to DPR's Worker Health and Safety Branch where they are evaluated and categorized to determine illness trends and potential areas for further investigation. Individual reports may vary. Sometimes, a specific pesticide or pesticides cannot be identified.

GYPSY MOTH INSPECTIONS

Our office routinely inspects incoming household goods shipments with outdoor items coming into Sonoma County from states infested with gypsy moth. The states infested with gypsy moth spread from the east coast to the mid-west. Our office receives a faxed copy of a quarantine hold notice given to the moving company truck driver for the household goods shipment. The hold notice is issued by one of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) border stations. The truck driver gives his copy to the owner of the shipment. The homeowner then calls our office and arranges

GYPSY MOTH INSPECTIONS CONTINUED

a time to have their outdoor items inspected by exclusion biologists Paul Turano or Ron Inman.

Recently on an incoming shipment from Massachusetts delivered to a Sonoma residence, biologist Inman found viable gypsy moth egg masses. There were two egg masses found on one wheel of a B.B.Q. grill. The egg masses were determined to be viable by an entomologist with the CDFA Plant Pest Diagnostics Lab in Sacramento. Biologist Inman did a thorough search of the shipment, and did not find any other life stages. The move-in site will be monitored with a pheromone trap for gypsy moth by our exotic insect detection team starting in May.

Gypsy moth is one of the exotic insects that are of great concern to CDFA and the California agricultural commissioners. In the area that gypsy moth infests it can defoliate millions of acres of forest. The female gypsy moth cannot fly and must rely on pheromones, which attract males from moderate distances, in order to mate.

The females lay oval-shaped egg masses that are covered with buff or yellowish colored hairs from the female's body. Each egg mass can contain up to 1,000 eggs. The velvety egg masses average about 1-½ inches long and about ¾ of an inch wide.

The usual method by which gypsy moths enter California is as a hitchhiker. The female lays her eggs, during the last summer months on trees, outdoor furniture, automobiles, trailers, boats, and campers. Females can lay their eggs in very small tight spaces in pipes, and the undercarriage of vehicles. When conducting a gypsy moth inspection our biologists carry flashlights to look inside tight spaces on the homeowner's outdoor items. The biologist often has to turn over outdoor furniture to look inside enclosed areas where the egg masses might be hidden.

Biologist Inman should be congratulated on finding gypsy moth before it could become established in this area. The move-in

residence is located in a wooded area, where gypsy moth could have become easily established.

PESTICIDE USE APPLICATION INSPECTIONS

The weather has gotten warmer, and trees and vines have started blooming and leafing out. Growers will soon be applying their first foliar fungicide or insecticide treatments to their crops.

Our pesticide use enforcement staff will be out looking for applications to make sure they are being done properly. Our staff performs pesticide use inspections to ensure the applicator is following applicable rules and regulations designed to protect the applicator, other people, and the environment.

Our biologists patrol in their assigned areas for pesticide applications. When a biologist sees an application being made they will stop and watch the application for a few minutes. The biologist will watch the applicator to make sure the pesticide is being applied in a safe and effective manner. The application equipment should be in good working condition with a proper covering and sight gauge. The biologist will note what the applicator is wearing in the way of personal protective equipment. Once the biologist has watched the application and noted whether there are any problems, the biologist will then flag down the applicator from a safe distance. Once the applicator has turned off the equipment, and the area is safe to enter, the biologist will then interview the applicator.

During the interview, the applicator will be asked their name, their employer and where the mix and load site is located. The biologist will also need to know the pesticide being applied, the rate per acre and the dilution.

PESTICIDE USE APPLICATION INSPECTIONS CONTINUED

The gallon capacity of the spray tank will also be noted on the inspection form. While the applicator is stopped they will be asked if they have eyewash available to them on the tractor. If the label of the pesticide being applied requires the applicator to wear eye protection, then there needs to be a pint of eyewash on the tractor.

The biologist will ask if there is soap, water, single-use towels, and extra coveralls available to them for decontamination, if necessary, at the mix and load site. Some applicators will carry this safety equipment on the tractor with them in an enclosed container.

Once the interview with the applicator has concluded, the biologist will then travel to the mix and load site. At the mix and load site, the pesticide labels will be reviewed. The information from the label that the biologist will review is: the name of the chemical, the manufacturer, rate per acre, re-entry period, and the safety equipment that the applicator is required to wear. The biologist will check the mix and load site for soap, water and single-use towels. The pesticide containers need to be either locked up, or under control by the applicator or other employees at the site. Any empty containers need to be triple-rinsed, and the rinse added back to the tank mix.

If the applicator is an employee they are required by regulation to wear eye protection, and in most instances chemical resistant gloves, as well.

When pesticides are mixed and loaded they need to be properly measured, and any additional personal protective equipment required by the label needs to be worn. Some pesticides call for a chemical-resistant apron to be worn, during the mix and load.

