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In \$1 Million Deal, EPA For First Time Allows Red Cross Symbol on Pesticide Products; Groups Say Label Misleads on Consumer Safety and Violates Law

The 50 state pesticide regulatory agencies were asked today in a letter from the national public health and environmental group Beyond Pesticides not to allow the marketing of pesticide products labeled with the Red Cross symbol under a \$1 million cause-related marketing campaign launched by the Clorox Company. Last month, a dozen groups petitioned EPA to stop the release of a new soon-to-be released label with the Red Cross symbol, which they say will mislead consumers and violates federal law prohibiting such labeling.

(Washington, DC, March 12, 2007) All state agencies regulating pesticide use were asked today by environmental health advocates to prohibit the marketing of pesticide products with a new label that displays the Red Cross symbol because it violates federal pesticide law and misleads consumers on product safety. Clorox says on some of its new soon-to-be released pesticide labels that it will donate up to \$1 million to the Red Cross when people purchase the products. Last month, a dozen groups petitioned EPA to stop the release of the new labels, which they say will mislead consumers and violates federal law prohibiting such labeling.

According to a letter sent to state regulators by the national public health and environmental group Beyond Pesticides, "The use of the Red Cross symbol implies an endorsement of the product and may imply an endorsement of its safety to many, which may mislead users and contribute to product misuse."

While Clorox products are mistakenly viewed as safe chemical products without potential hazards, they do contain toxic materials that must be handled very carefully. Some of the products require that they be diluted with water and warn that they can cause irritation of the eyes, skin, respiratory and gastrointestinal tract. Exposure to high levels can result in severe corrosive damage to the eyes, skin, respiratory and gastrointestinal tissues. The label on some Clorox products warns, "Although not expected, heart conditions or chronic respiratory problems such as asthma, chronic bronchitis or obstructive lung disease may be aggravated by exposure to high concentrations of vapor or mist." Some of the products are suspected neurotoxicants. "While EPA should ensure severe caution when using pesticides, a label displaying the Red Cross symbol sends a misleading message that will undoubtedly result in greater product misuse because of a failure to heed important product warnings," said Jay Feldman, executive director of Beyond Pesticides.

Twelve environmental health organizations petitioned EPA in February, citing a blatant violation of its own guidelines which prohibit false and misleading labels, including: "Symbols implying safety or nontoxicity, such as a Red Cross or a medical seal of approval (caduceus)." EPA's own review finds compliance with labels tied to consumer perception of product safety.

For background, see <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/redcross>