

School Pesticide Monitor

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California County Attempts To Stop Chemical Trespass

After two years of residents calling on local authorities for greater protection from drifting airborne pesticides, Tulare County, California has adopted new pesticide buffer zone rules that prohibit aerial applications of restricted use pesticides within 1/4 mile of schools in session or due to be in session within 24 hours, occupied farm labor camps and residential areas.

The Allensworth School Board, the Cutler-Orosi School Board and over 1,750 organizations and individuals endorsed the call for buffer zones in Tulare County. Community members launched efforts to establish buffer zones because of the serious health risks posed by pesticide exposure, ranging from short-term effects such as dizziness, vomiting and rashes to long-term effects including asthma, cancer, birth defects, damage to the developing child and neurological harm.

According to the *Mercury News*, "An Associated Press investigation found that 590 people in California were sickened by pesticides at schools from 1996 to 2005, more than a third of which were due to pesticide drift."

Over 50% of all public schools in Tulare County are within 1/4 mile of agricultural operations. Towns such as Plainview that are next to alfalfa or cotton fields where aerial applications are common will benefit the most from the new rules.

"This is a great victory for communities who regularly and unwillingly breathe pesticides in their day to day lives," said

Irma Arrollo, director of El Quinto Sol de América, a local Lindsay community group. "Regular people can change things when they get together. This is just a first step to protect the health of our families from pesticides. It's an excellent start."

Tulare joins Kern and King Counties in having the strongest buffer zone requirements in the San Joaquin Valley. Other San Joaquin Valley counties either have weaker or no general buffer zone rules in place around schools, labor camps and residences.

Pesticide drift is an inevitable problem in pest management strategies that rely

on spray and dust pesticide formulations. Although of greatest concern is the aerial application of pesticides, where up to 40% of the pesticide is lost to drift, pesticides can also drift when applied from a truck or hand held applicator.

According to Beyond Pesticides' report *Getting the Drift on Chemical Trespass*, seven states (AL, AZ, CT, LA, MA, NJ, and NC) have recognized the importance of controlling drift by restricting pesticide applications around school properties, residential areas and other sensitive sites. State required buffer zones range from 100 feet to 2 1/2 miles, depending on the application method, pesticide type and site to be protected from potential drift.

County Honors Earth Heroes at Schools

Students, teachers and staff from schools across King County, Washington are being honored as Earth Heroes by Executive Ron Sims for their noteworthy actions on behalf of the environment. The Earth Heroes at School Awards recognizes projects that include food scrap composting, carbon dioxide emissions reduction, sustainable landscape and gardening practices, and science curricula that encourage environmental leadership.

The ten winners participate in the King County Green Schools Program and have made commitments as individual schools or as part of their school district to set measurable goals to conserve resources and encourage behavioral changes that benefit the environment.

One of the award winners is the

Gatewood Elementary School in Seattle. The program was initiated by the school's PTA to remove invasive plants from playground slopes and involved eight work parties of parents, students, teachers and community members using non-pesticide techniques, including 58 goats.

More than 1,000 volunteer hours resulted in the removal of 160 cubic yards of plant material to a composting facility. The school is on track to be the first officially designated Pesticide Free Grounds in the school district.

"The passion and commitment of our local heroes to preserve our environmental legacy in King County is an example we can all follow," Mr. Sims said. He continued, "We are fortunate to have these environmental stewards in our midst."

