

Lawsuit Seeks Ban of Common WA Farm Pesticide

Local News

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SEATTLE - From hay, mint and onions to apples and cherries, some Washington farmers rely on a pesticide called chlorpyrifos, also sold as Lorsban. Its use is as controversial as it is common across the country, and a lawsuit filed Thursday seeks an outright ban by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Chlorpyrifos combats insects by causing nerve damage, but watchdog groups say it can do the same to humans. It was banned for household use in the United States about ten years ago. The Natural Resources Defense Council and the Pesticide Action Network have objected to its continued use in agriculture, and they say the EPA has had their petition for three years without taking action on it. Their attorney is Kevin Regan with Earthjustice.

"As far as pesticides go, this is one of the worst of the worst. Science clearly shows that chlorpyrifos doesn't just poison insects, it poisons people. And, our suit is attempting to get EPA to take action and make a decision, once and for all."

Regan says the EPA reevaluates pesticides every 15 years, and is not scheduled to act on chlorpyrifos until 2015.

So, the suit is an attempt to speed up the process.

"Right now, the United States is behind the curve with a number of other nations. Countries all over the world - for example, recently, South Africa - have already completely banned use of chlorpyrifos. We believe it's time for EPA to take action."

Its maker, Dow AgroSciences, says chlorpyrifos has been the subject of more than 500 studies and reports, which, in its words, are "largely reassuring" about its effects on human health and the environment. The company also has a website full of farmers' comments, including the Washington Hay Growers' Association, saying the chemical is a necessary part of their pest control activities.

The suit was filed in the Southern District of New York. The Pesticide Action Network website

contains background on the controversy surrounding the chemical, at www.panna.org. Dow's site with rebuttal information is www.chlorpyrifos.com.