

Environment & Energy

California Urged to Ban Parkinson's-Linked Herbicide Paraquat

By Zach Bright

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- State pesticide authority asked to ban paraquat
 - Substance linked to environmental, health harms
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California should ban the use of paraquat, an herbicide connected to Parkinson's disease, conservation and public health groups urged in a letter to the department sent Friday.

Groups including the Center for Biological Diversity and Californians for Pesticide Reform requested that the California Department of Pesticide Regulation "begin reevaluation, suspension, and cancellation proceedings for pesticide products containing paraquat."

Using paraquat presents dangers to endangered wildlife species, farmworkers, and nearby communities, the letter added.

The Environmental Protection Agency said last year it would allow continued use of paraquat with revised measures aimed at protecting people and the environment, but continue to examine the effects on endangered species. The EPA said this September it needs to reassess the safety and risks of paraquat.

"The only way to stop this dangerous herbicide from continuing to poison our environment and farming communities is to ban it," said Jonathan Evans, environmental health legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The request came on the same day that public comment on California's annual pesticide renewal process ends.

'Huge Disparity'

Groups have cited the impact that pesticide use has on communities that face disproportionate amounts of pollution.

"There's a huge disparity in who bears the greatest risk of exposure, with use overwhelmingly concentrated in the predominantly Latinx farm-working communities of the San Joaquin Valley," said Jane Sellen, co-director of Californians for Pesticide Reform.

Paraquat is prohibited in 58 countries. It's one of the state's five most-used herbicides, and state data showed that California used more than 1.3 million pounds in 2018 alone.

The state Department of Pesticide Regulation didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

A lawsuit was filed last year to challenge the EPA's reapproval of the pesticide's use nationwide. Earthjustice is representing environmentalists, farmworkers groups, and public health organizations in the ongoing suit.

To contact the reporter on this story: Zach Bright at zbright@bloombergindustry.com

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Chuck McCutcheon at cmccutcheon@bloombergindustry.com

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