



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy

Vision: Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

Pesticides – Use of Chlorpyrifos - Prohibition HB 229

Position: SUPPORT

February 12, 2020

The Maryland Public Health Association appreciates the opportunity to submit this letter of support for Delegate Stein’s HB 229 to ban the use of the harmful pesticide, chlorpyrifos. A core tenet of public health is prevention, and preventing harm often involves preventing exposure. In the case of chemical safety policy – often involving pesticides – preventing exposure involved banning specific chemicals or classes of chemicals known to cause harm. This is the safest way to protect people, particularly those most vulnerable to impacts if they are exposed. There are other options implemented by the agriculture industry, such as the use of personal protective equipment like masks and gloves, but those are subject to user error and may malfunction, creating scenarios with potential high exposure. Only a ban can prevent further exposure.

Put on the market in 1965, the use of chlorpyrifos rapidly scaled and it became one of the most common ingredients in pesticides in the country. More than 30 years later, the EPA started to phase out chlorpyrifos and it has in fact been banned for use indoors since 2000. The Public Health Statement from 1997 on chlorpyrifos from the Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ATSDR) includes the following information about how chlorpyrifos can impact human health:

In people, short-term oral exposure (one day) to low (milligrams) levels of chlorpyrifos can cause dizziness, fatigue, runny nose or eyes, salivation, nausea, intestinal discomfort, sweating, and changes in heart rate. Short-term oral exposure to much higher (grams) levels of chlorpyrifos may cause paralysis, seizures, loss of consciousness, and death. Reports in people also show that short-term exposure to chlorpyrifos may cause muscle weakness weeks after the original symptoms have disappeared. Other effects of exposure to chlorpyrifos include changes in behavior or sleeping pattern, mood changes, and effects on the nerves and/or muscles in the limbs (which may appear as odd sensations such as numbness or tingling, or as muscle weakness).¹

The first studies indicating particularly harmful impacts on children were published in the early 2000s. The evidence has only grown. Children can be exposed in utero, most likely from parents who work in agricultural fields and spray the pesticides, and also throughout early childhood directly from fields or on produce shipped around the country. Throughout these stages, children are still developing their vital organs, which is why exposure to harmful chemicals can have lifelong impacts that are costly for individuals, families, and society. In an amicus brief for the ninth circuit court of appeals case, *League of United Latin American Citizens, et al. and the State of New York, et al. vs. Andrew Wheeler and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*, health agencies including the American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics wrote, “...chlorpyrifos can alter the very structure of the brain itself, as well as result

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in an increased prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other behavioral problems.”² This is why MdPHA supports a ban on chlorpyrifos. It is imperative that we protect the health and wellbeing of all children by eliminating exposure to this hazard. And, while we are heartened by the recent announcement from Corteva Agriscience, the largest domestic producer of chlorpyrifos, that they will stop producing it, we know that it was a business-driven decision and not a one made to protect human health.³ A permanent ban will by definition protect Maryland residents in perpetuity, regardless of market-driven decisions from any company or political decisions by any administration. Thank you for considering our statement.

MdPHA is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education efforts and advocacy of public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a 142-year-old professional organization with more than 25,000 members dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our nation.

1. Available from: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/phs/phs.asp?id=493&tid=88>
2. Available from: <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/advocacy-for-public-health/testimony-and-comments>
3. Washington Post article, available from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/02/06/trump-kept-this-controversial-pesticide-market-now-its-biggest-manufacturer-is-stopping-production/>