

The Register-Guard



OPINION HOME

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Senate bill offers protection from aerial sprays

BY LISA ARKIN

For The Register-Guard

MARCH 22, 2017

I imagine how you'd feel if you woke up one day and found your land contaminated with Atrazine and 2,4-D. Imagine further if your business depended on that land being organic. I think you'd be angry!

That happened last year to a stellar environmental steward, Mountain Rose Herbs. The Eugene company had to sell a 60-acre organic property because of spray drift that was likely from adjacent commercial timber operations.



Sadly, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program provides no compensation in the event that an organic producer is faced with a loss stemming from pesticide trespass. Yet because of advances in residue testing technologies, the organic industry is finding fresh evidence of pesticide residue contamination. Businesses have no recourse other than crop destruction, land forfeiture and revocation of organic certification.

Not only are organic farms faced with harm and property damage caused by drifting aerial herbicide sprays, communities west of the Cascades have found timber's wayward herbicides on their property, in their drinking water and even in their urine.

Remember the dozens of people sprayed in Gold Beach? Remember the residents of Rockaway Beach who discovered that the town's drinking water was contaminated after nearly all forested lands uphill were clear-cut and sprayed repeatedly with herbicides? Remember when 2,4-D was detected in the urine of children in rural western Lane County following a season of nearby aerial herbicide sprays? Finding carcinogenic herbicides in children is not normal. When chemicals are expelled through your urine, it means they have already traveled through various organ systems where damage can occur on the cellular level.

I attended a 2015 presentation by Dr. Fred Berman, director of the Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences' Toxicology Information Center, when he reviewed the harmful effects of chronic, low-level insecticide and herbicide exposures for state officials. "Chronic, low level" exposures are the kinds experienced by residents when timber companies spray nearby timber clear cuts, sometimes as often as four years in succession. Berman pointed out the research on serious and possibly lethal sicknesses such as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and other blood cancers, prostate cancer, breast cancer and kidney cancer.

No child should suffer these diseases. No parent should have to watch their child suffer through them, either.



Meanwhile, the timber industry tries to distract the public from the truth that aerial pesticide sprays can be very dangerous. One timber spokesperson, former Lane County Commissioner Anna Morrison, falsely opined in a recent guest viewpoint that Oregon's 60-foot pesticide buffers are the "nation's best." To the contrary, Oregon timber trespass laws are embarrassing when compared with those in other states. Arizona, Washington, California and Idaho require larger protective buffers than our home state because their laws are based on the best available science and the value of protecting health.

Other states regulate pesticide drift as an ultra-hazardous activity. In fact, in Arizona, where Morrison now lives, the laws require a 1,320-foot school buffer zone to protect children from pesticide drift, nearly 20 times larger than the buffers mandated by Oregon's laws.

In Oregon, timber laws were written by the industry itself, born in a political climate promoting secrecy and lack of accountability. Oregon lacks a clear policy to warn nearby landowners before aerial spraying begins near their homes, gardens and organic farms.

After refusing to adopt health-based buffer zones, the 2015 Legislature failed to pass a law requiring timely notification to residents, schools, medical facilities and organic farmers prior to aerial pesticide applications on nearby industrial timber land. When will Oregon step up to protect the public from pesticide drift?

Senate Bill 892, sponsored by Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, requires the timber industry to work with the Department of Forestry to provide advance notice and chemical information about timber aerial spray practices. Communities and organic farmers whose livelihoods depend on being pesticide-free have the right to know when and what is being sprayed.

Oregon's timber industries force rural communities to pay a high price for aerial sprays with illness and contaminated drinking water. Organic farmers risk significant losses when their

organic certification is compromised. When these two industries clash, we all lose by favoring the timber industry. In Lane County alone the timber industry employs just over 4,000 — compared to the organic and natural products industry, which employs more than 15,000 people.

Passing SB 892 will help uphold the standards of a growing Oregon organic farming industry whose certification relies on being pesticide-free. It is inherently unfair that locally based organic companies like Mountain Rose Herbs suffer losses due to the ultra-hazardous activity of the timber industry.

Lisa Arkin of Eugene is executive director of Beyond Toxics, which has worked on Oregon forestry herbicide issues for more than a decade.

More [GUEST VIEWPOINT](#) articles »

RG Opinion

Editorials, commentary & more delivered to your inbox.

Sign up

COMMENTS (1)

[LOG IN](#)

Post your comment...

SUBMIT

Sort by [Highest rated](#)

[Hide replies](#)



motleycrew

14 hours ago

The bill seems pretty straight forward.

Notification not earlier than 3 months or less than 7 days before of what, where and when would be required with a follow up as to what, where, when, and the weather and wind of the actual spray.

Unless this results in dozens of lawsuits to effectively deny any spraying on private forests at all, of course.

The eco-Nazis are capable of following that tactic, as has been shown for decades in the National forests, the Elliott Forest and so forth with law suit followed by law suit followed by law suit.

Flag

React

Reply