



For Immediate Release

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Congresswoman Barbara Lee Asks for Freeze of Apple Moth Aerial Spray

Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-Oakland) has sent a strongly worded letter to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) calling for a halt to aerial spraying for the Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) in California until comprehensive health and environmental evaluations are done.

In the letter, which was released to the public on May 15, Congresswoman Lee asks “that USDA strongly encourage CDFA to freeze plans for the aerial spraying in California pending the completion of an environmental impact report, a rigorous scientific study of alternative solutions for addressing the LBAM population, and comprehensive toxicity tests that account for both the short and long-term impacts of the entire pheromone-pesticide compound. It is imperative that the people of California are not subjected to unknown risks of aerial pheromone treatments without proper scientific review and consideration of public participation and comment.”

Rep. Lee’s call for comprehensive and independent toxicity tests of the short and long-term effects of the spraying highlights the shortcomings of the current testing, recently announced by the Governor, of the pesticide formulas proposed for use this summer. Those tests address only short-term exposure and do not study the long-term, continuing exposure risks Bay Area residents will face from the monthly spraying program that is planned to continue for several years.

Rep. Lee’s letter also points to the East Bay Municipal Utility District’s concerns about the risk to the water supply from aerial spraying, and highlights the contradiction inherent in starting spraying this summer before an Environmental Impact Report is complete. The letter notes that the recent report released by the state regarding the health complaints filed after last fall’s spraying in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties contains disclaimers that it “should not be considered a thorough epidemiological exploration” and that “numerous data and study design limitations” leave it unable to determine whether or not the health complaints were linked to the spraying. In light of the report’s limitations, Rep. Lee calls for a “comprehensive plan for measuring the ongoing public health impacts that will yield accurate quantifiable results which are necessary to make serious decisions regarding the future aerial application of pheromones in California.”

In response to Congresswoman Lee's letter, Robert Lieber, RN, Mayor of Albany, said "We are very pleased that Congresswoman Lee has stated her deep concern about the human and environmental health risks of the USDA/CDFAs apple moth eradication plan. Her letter points to the lack of solid scientific basis for the eradication program and clearly lays out the reasons this program should be halted."

Opposition groups are asking that the USDA downgrade LBAM's status so that it is no longer a quarantinable pest targeted for eradication, both to stop the unnecessary eradication program and to relieve farmers who suffer from current LBAM quarantines. Nan Wishner, Chair of the City of Albany Integrated Pest Management Task Force explains, "There is no evidence or scientific basis for considering this relatively benign moth a dangerous pest. Entomologists tell us it has been present in California for decades and is likely already being controlled by natural predators. CDFAs itself states that the LBAM has caused no crop damage. This eradication program is about trade politics, not science or risks to crops. Congresswoman Lee has taken an important step toward stopping the program by addressing her concerns to the USDA, which should alter LBAM's categorization based on up-to-date science."

Congresswoman Lee is the third Bay Area representative to publicly question the LBAM eradication plan. Last week, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) wrote to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger requesting he answer concerns about the safety and efficacy of the program, and in late April Senator Dianne Feinstein wrote to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer expressing similar concerns. Meanwhile more than 26,000 citizens have signed an on-line petition opposing the spray. In addition, 25 city and county governments in California have officially opposed the plan along with more than 70 organizations, including, most recently, the California Nurses Association, the Oakland Zoo, the East Bay Municipal Utilities District Board, and the East Bay Regional Park District Board.

In fall 2007, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFAs), with funding from USDA, aeri ally sprayed pheromone-based pesticides over populated areas in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. More than 600 people reported adverse health reactions. CDFAs plans to expand spraying this August to include the San Francisco Bay Area. Seven counties, with a total population of 4.8 million people, are within the spray zone.

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Pesticide Watch is a statewide public health and environmental group that works side-by-side with communities to clean up pesticide pollution and prevent pesticide exposure.