Derivation of Aquatic Life Benchmarks and Quality Assurance

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ABSTRACT
Aquatic life benchmarks, developed by US EPA’s Office of Pesticide Program (OPP), are toxicological reference values below which pesticides are not expected to harm aquatic life. The benchmark values are derived from the most recent publicly available OPP risk assessment for the pesticide, and are based on the most sensitive acute and chronic toxicity data for each taxon represented. Those acute and chronic toxicity values are available for freshwater fish and invertebrates, and aquatic vascular and non-vascular plants. The benchmarks are to be used as interim measures of whether pesticide residues detected in surface water are sufficient to warrant additional regulatory action, or to refine monitoring efforts. Current, benchmark values are posted for some 331 pesticides and degradates. State agencies use the aquatic life benchmarks to inform regulatory decisions for pesticides, and to interpret water monitoring data.

BACKGROUND
The aim of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) is to provide federal control of pesticide distribution, sale and use. All pesticides used in the United States must be registered by EPA. Registration assures that pesticides will be properly labeled and that health and the environment if used in accordance with labeling. EPA imprisons measures of exposure and effects for the pesticide active ingredient in the risk assessment process for all regulatory decisions. The typical assessment endpoints for pesticide ecological risk assessments are reduced survival for aquatic animals from direct acute exposures and survival, growth, and reproductive impairment for aquatic animals from direct chronic exposures. The assessment endpoint for aquatic plants (vascular and non-vascular) typically focus on growth rates and biomass measurements. Aquatic life benchmarks are estimates of toxicological concentrations below which effects to aquatic organisms are not considered likely to occur and above which there is an increasing likelihood of effects. The benchmarks can be used as interim measures of whether pesticide residues detected in surface water are sufficient to warrant additional regulatory action, or to refine monitoring efforts. OPP published a website with benchmarks for 71 pesticides and degradates in 2007, and expanded them to 148 in 2009 and expanded to 240 pesticides in 2010. Currently, the website contains aquatic benchmarks for 331 pesticides and degradates. California Department of Pesticide Regulation has contributed to benchmark derivation and quality assurance processes since 2009.

OBJECTIVES
• To expand the number of pesticides with available benchmarks and update the benchmarks as new risk assessments become available.
• To ensure that the benchmarks are technically sound, consistent with EPA risk assessment evaluation and methods.

DATA SOURCES
• ECOTOX data base (http://cfpub.epa.gov/ecotox/)
• Study submissions for registration
• Public literature

PROCEDURES FOR DATA EXTRACTION
• Identify most sensitive species with lowest toxicity values in each taxon
• Calculate benchmarks:
  • Acute Freshwater Vertebrate and Invertebrate = most sensitive toxicity value x Level of Concern (e.g., 96-hr LC₅₀ x 0.5)
  • Chronic Freshwater Vertebrate and Invertebrate = most sensitive toxicity value x Level of Concern (e.g., NOAEC x 1.0)
  • Aquatic Plants (vascular, nonvascular) = most sensitive toxicity value x Level of Concern (e.g., EC₅₀ x 1.0)

Estimate toxicity values for a species by using acute-to-chronic ratios (ACR = LC₅₀/NOAEC) of other species

USE OF BENCHMARKS
• As a reference concentration to evaluate potential risks of pesticide residues detected in surface water
• As one of the indicators to prioritize pesticides for urban and agricultural environmental monitoring in California

HARMONIZATION BETWEEN OPP & OW
EPA Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) and Office of Water (OW) are working in an effort to harmonize on the data used to derived aquatic life benchmarks and water quality criteria. The purpose is to provide a common dataset for the characterization of aquatic effects of pesticides under the CWA and FIFRA resulting in effects assessments that are consistent with both statutes

SIMILARITIES IN WATER QUALITY CRITERIA AND BENCHMARKS
• Use all available reliable aquatic toxicity data, including data from public literature
• Peer reviewed data, with transparent data quality standards
• Use same assessment endpoints (survival, growth, reproduction)
• Use ACRs to estimate chronic values
• Focus on sensitive aquatic species

DIFFERENCES IN BENCHMARKS AND WATER QUALITY CRITERIA
• Multiple toxicity values representing different taxonomic groups
  • One toxicity value integrates results from different taxonomic groups
  • Based on lower 5th percentile of species-sensitivity distribution
  • Individual toxicity values are averaged with genera to form distribution of genus means
  • Freshwater: fish, invertebrates, vascular and non-vascular plants
  • Freshwater: 8 animal families, 1 plant family
  • Developed for all registration actions
  • Developed according to national priority

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
We thank following individuals who contributed to the project: Peter Barnes, Martha Dias, Amanda Eberle, Lina Kiusue, Emily Lisker, Kimberly Osinski, Erin Russell, and April Van Scoy

REFERENCES