NEWS RELEASE

California Environmental Protection Agency | **California Department of Food and Agriculture**

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TASK FORCE FORMED TO STUDY
ALTERNATIVES TO OZONE-DEPLETING PESTICIDE

SACRAMENTO -- California Department of Food and Agriculture Director Henry J. Voss and Secretary for Environmental Protection James M. Strock today announced the formation of a task force that will explore the development of alternative technologies and procedures that would eliminate methyl bromide emissions from structural and agricultural uses in California.

The Methyl Bromide Research Task Force will be co-chaired by Voss and James W. Wells, Director of Cal/EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation.

"Should methyl bromide be phased out before we have feasible alternative pest control methods available for its broad spectrum of critical uses, the impact on California agriculture would be significant," Voss said. "Without alternatives, agricultural production would suffer, meaning that consumers would have less produce to choose from, and it would be more costly."

Strock said, "The United States must continue to lead the international effort to phase out chemicals which deplete the ozone layer. As part of that effort, we must develop alternatives to methyl bromide, especially for uses that are critical to California."

Wells said, "We want to establish Cal/EPA and the Department of Pesticide Regulation as national leaders in facilitating the development of more environmentally benign pest control strategies, and in encouraging farmers to adopt alternative methods of pest control."

Methyl bromide, the most widely used pesticide in the world, was recently declared an ozone depleter by the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, a group of nations that signed a treaty to protect the ozone layer. The group agreed last month that by 1995, production and

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use would be frozen at 1991 levels; the group exempted quarantine and pre-shipment uses from this action. Further reductions will be based on upcoming scientific and technology assessments.

Action is also expected in the United States, under the mandates of the Clean Air Act, which does not allow exemptions for quarantine and pre-shipment uses.

(For information on methyl bromide use in California, see fact sheet, attached.)

The task force will review the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Methyl Bromide Research Plan to ensure that national research efforts in this arena are relevant to California's needs, and will make recommendations to USDA. The task force will also evaluate alternatives to methyl bromide fumigation not covered under the USDA plan, and interact with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Air Quality of research opportunities for development of alternatives.

Members will include representatives of leading agricultural commodity groups, as well as representatives of the structural pest control industry and environmental groups. Their first meeting will early next year.

Members include: Will Allen, community outreach, California Institute for Rural Studies; Patricia Clary, executive director, Californians for Alternatives to Toxics; Anne Downs, California Seed Association; Tom Dufala, director of research, Trical Inc., Morgan Hill; David Howecamp, director, Air and Toxics Division, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region IX; Dr. Vernard Lewis, University of California, Berkeley; Richard Nutter, Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner, representing the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association; Jack J. Pandol, production manager, Pandol & Sons, of Delano; Dr. Dennis Rolston, associate chair of soils and biogeochemicals, University of California, Davis; John Sansone, representing the Pest Control Operators of California; William Thomas, of Seyfarth, Shaw, Fairweather and Geraldson, Sacramento,
representing the California Grape and Tree Fruit League and other methyl bromide users;
and Dr. Pat Vail, director, U.S. Department of Agriculture Horticultural Crops Research Laboratory, Fresno.

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Also on the task force are representatives to be named from the state's carrot and cotton industries; the Agricultural Council of California; California Air Resources Board; California Association of Pest Control Advisors; California Cut Flower Association; California Dried Fruit Association; California Farm Bureau Federation; California Grain and Feed Association; California Nursery Association; California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Salinas; California Strawberry Advisory Board; University of California (Davis) Center for Pest Management Research and Extension; and Western Growers Association.

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Attached: Fact Sheet on Methyl Bromide

FACT SHEET ON METHYL BROMIDE

BACKGROUND: Methyl bromide is one of the most widely used pesticides in the world. In use since 1932, it kills insects, mites, rodents, plant diseases, nematodes, termites, and weeds. In California, it is registered as a preplant soil fumigant; as a fumigant for stored commodities (both raw agricultural commodities and processed foods and feeds); for termite control in homes and other structures; and to fumigate mills, ships, railroad cars and other transportation vehicles.

For many of California's major fruit and vegetable crops, methyl bromide is the product of choice. There were 20.1 million pounds of methyl bromide used in California in 1990. The most significant uses were: 26 percent for structural fumigations; 21 percent to treat strawberry fields before planting; 8 percent to treat greenhouse soil before planting of nursery stock; 7 percent to treat processed grapes; 4 percent for treatment of soil before planting; and 3 percent to treat almond acreage before planting and nuts after harvest.

There are two major soil fumigants available to California farmers: methyl bromide and metam-sodium. Four other major soil fumigants have been lost to various regulatory actions over the past 12 years.

Plant quarantine and trade issues: Many farm commodities must be treated to prevent the spread of pests before the commodity can be transported across county, state or international borders. Methyl bromide, which replaced the banned fumigant ethylene dibromide (EDB), is one of the few products left on the market to fumigate produce (fruit, vegetables, nuts and nursery products) for export. The fumigation requirement is imposed by the country or state of destination.

Nursery stock: In order to prevent the spread of serious nematode pests, California law requires that certain nursery stock must be grown on soil that has been treated in an approved manner. This applies to fruit and nut trees, grapevines, berry vegetable plants, kiwi and other nursery stock sold for on-farm planting. Since the suspension in California of 1,3-dichloropropene (trade name, Telone), the only approved treatment for fields is fumigation with methyl bromide under tarp. (Soil in beds, flats or containers may be treated with steam.)

CALIFORNIA REGULATORY ACTION: In April, 1992, the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) mandated new use practices for structural fumigations with methyl bromide, then the most widely used chemical to treat structural infestations. Acting by emergency regulation, the Department established mandatory aeration times following fumigation.

DPR's action was based on review of toxicology studies which demonstrated that previous aeration practices did not provide an adequate margin of safety to persons returning to recently fumigated structures. There was concern both over acute neurotoxic effects, and over the possibility of birth defects.

DPR made its findings available to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) which, in April, also announced parallel action to change structural practices on a nationwide basis.

The next focus was agricultural use practices, because they were also based on the older toxicology data which had been superseded by the new studies. DPR has been working since April with methyl bromide field and commodity fumigators to develop exposure data. There are a wide variety of uses and application methods, and these groups have been cooperative in developing data. These data are being used by DPR to formulate new use practices designed to ensure an adequate margin of safety for workers and others who may be exposed to methyl bromide. Among changes that will be imposed, effective no later than January 1, are protective measures for applicators and other workers, reduced application rates, and larger buffer zones around field fumigations to protect occupants of nearby structures.

OVERVIEW OF OZONE ISSUE: Methyl bromide potential role as an ozone depleter is under scrutiny in both the national and international arenas. In November 1992, the nations that are signatories to the Montreal Protocol listed methyl bromide's ozone depletion potential (ODP) as 0.7. USEPA is required by Section 602 of the Clean Air Act to list as a Class I ozone depleter any substance with an ODP of 0.2 or greater. Once designated, USEPA must to phase out all production by no later than the year 2000, and develop a schedule for the phaseout of methyl bromide use.

In a general alert to pesticide registrants in March, USEPA pointed out that the Clean Air Act does not contain a risk/benefit balancing process that would allow retention of essential or high benefit uses. Therefore, the agency said, a phaseout would not depend on the availability of alternative products.

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