NEWS RELEASE

California Environmental Protection Agency
Department of Pesticide Regulation

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Release No. 93-01
Date: January 12, 1993

APPROVAL GIVEN TO FUMIGATION METHOD THAT REDUCES METHYL BROMIDE EMISSIONS

SACRAMENTO -- Cal/EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation today announced approval of a new structural fumigation method that will reduce the amount of the pesticide methyl bromide released into the air. Methyl bromide has been identified by an international organization as an ozone-depleter.

"We have granted a special pesticide registration for the use of carbon dioxide in structural fumigation," said James W. Wells, DPR Director. "Carbon dioxide is the key element in a new method that significantly reduces the amount of methyl bromide needed to kill wood-destroying pests, thereby reducing the amount of this chemical that is released into the air.

"Because less methyl bromide is used, the post-fumigation aeration period is significantly reduced," said Wells, "which should also reduce the cost to consumers.

"California is the first place in the nation where this new system is available. We felt it represented innovative, pollution-reducing technology," said Wells. "That's why we encouraged the system's developers to complete safety and efficacy studies, and then expedited its registration."

Two Southern California fumigation firms--Farmer Termite Co. and A-1 Fumigation Co., both of Bellflower--had been working on a way to reduce the amount of methyl bromide needed in structural fumigations for several years. However, development was speeded after DPR regulatory action last year significantly lengthened the period that a structure must be aired out after methyl bromide fumigation. During this aeration period, the structure is closed to anyone other than workers wearing self-contained breathing apparatus.

Methyl bromide is widely used in California to fumigate homes and other structures for termites and other pests, and to fumigate soil before planting and fruits and vegetables after harvest. In structural fumigations, homes are typically sealed with a large tarp before methyl bromide is pumped into them. The tarp is removed after approximately 24 hours, and the

structure is aerated, typically by opening doors and windows and using large fans to move air out of the building.

A review of toxicology tests early last year prompted DPR to change structural use practices. Before the change, fumigators were required to aerate a structure until a hand-held measuring device indicated that methyl bromide in the home had dropped below 5 parts per million (ppm). There was no minimum aeration period. To increase the margin of safety, DPR mandated a 72-hour aeration period, and made changes in the monitoring procedure as well. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is implementing similar changes nationwide.

Studies submitted by the developers of the new method demonstrated that adding carbon dioxide to methyl bromide pumped into a structure significantly increased its effectiveness, because the carbon dioxide causes termites and other insects to breathe deeper and more rapidly. Because of its increased effectiveness, two-thirds less methyl bromide can be used (8 ounces per 1000 square feet compared to the normal application rate of 1-1/2 pounds).

Soil Chemicals Corp. of Hollister, a manufacturer of methyl bromide, will market the new structural fumigation process under the brand name, Makr. Fumigation companies will be required to give their workers additional training in the new application method before using it.

"We wanted to allow this pollution-reducing, cost-saving technology to get to market as quickly as possible," said Wells, "so after we satisfied our concerns about its safety and efficacy, we decided to give it a Section 24(c) registration." Under federal pesticide law, this mechanism allows authorization of special local uses within a state.

Before being granted the special registration, the applicants had to submit studies to show the procedure was effective in killing pests. They also had to complete tests that demonstrated that a 24-hour aeration period sufficiently cleared methyl bromide and carbon dioxide from a structure. DPR monitored the aeration studies.

Carbon dioxide is a colorless, odorless gas present in the atmosphere. In industry, it has many uses, including extinguishing fires, preserving foods (as dry ice), and carbonating beverages. In humans, it is produced by the body's metabolism and exhaled with each breath.

Methyl bromide 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 use would be frozen at 1991 levels. (The group exempted

certain agricultural uses from this action.) Further reductions will be based on upcoming scientific and technology assessments. Parallel action is also expected in the United States, under the mandates of the Clean Air Act.

DPR and the California Department of Food and Agriculture recently formed a Methyl Bromide Research 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. Members include representatives of leading agricultural commodity groups, as well as representatives of the structural pest control industry and environmental groups. Their first meeting will be February 2.

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