



From the Director

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Assembly Bill 1963: Opportunity to Gauge Employee Safeguards

The Department of Pesticide Regulation's (DPR) ability to evaluate safeguards for agricultural employees who handle cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticides will improve significantly beginning Jan. 1, 2011.

That's when Assembly Bill 1963, signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in September, takes effect. The new law will require clinical laboratories to send electronic reports to DPR of the tests they do to look for possible poisoning from these pesticides. DPR will maintain a database of the results and share information with the Office of Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) on an ongoing basis.

DPR supported the legislation by Assemblyman Pedro Nava, Santa Barbara. It provides us with another tool to carry out our mandate to protect the health of agricultural employees by regulating pesticide use.

For more than 30 years, DPR has required growers to provide and pay for medical supervision and blood tests of their employees who handle cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticides. However, DPR did not have the information to evaluate if these requirements adequately protected employees because there is no requirement for reporting test results.

Cholinesterase is an enzyme that helps regulate nerve impulses. Overexposure to organophosphate and carbamate insecticides -- the two main classes of cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticides -- can reduce cholinesterase levels in the blood.

The laboratory data will help us evaluate the effectiveness of the program to determine if it is still necessary or needs improvement.

Use of products targeted by AB 1963 -- the two main classes of cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticide are organophosphates and carbamates -- has decreased and the incidence of severe illness has dropped even more. Of the few cases that continue to occur (0 to 5 per year identified from 2001 through 2007), the great majority involve accidental or deliberate ingestion of the pesticide.

By Dec. 31, 2015, DPR and OEHHA, in consultation with DPH, will report to the Legislature on the effectiveness of the laboratory-based reporting system and medical supervision program relating to illness surveillance. The report will also include recommendations to extend, expand or disband the program.

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