

EPA Agrees to Pesticide Buffers to Protect Salmon

JEFF BARNARD, Associated Press

GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — A federal agency has agreed to restore temporary buffer zones for spraying several common agricultural pesticides along salmon streams in Oregon, California and Washington while it continues work on a permanent rule.

The settlement agreement between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides was published Friday in the Federal Register.

It stems from an injunction imposing the buffers that was issued by a federal judge in Seattle in 2004, but that had expired before EPA implemented permanent regulations. The buffers apply to all salmon streams in the three states.

The buffers prohibit farmers from spraying on the ground within 60 feet of a salmon stream and aerial spraying within 300 feet. The buffers will not be included on pesticide labels until permanent restrictions are adopted by EPA.

Federal biologists have found that the five broad-spectrum insecticides — carbaryl, chlorpyrifos, diazinon, malathion and methomyl — will harm salmon even at very low levels. The chemicals can kill vegetation in the water that fish use to hide and kill insects. The chemicals can also kill other food items for fish and interfere with a fish's sense of smell, which it uses to avoid predators and navigate on migrations to the ocean and back again.

One key element of the settlement is that the buffers will no longer expire once Fisheries Services scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration finish updating an evaluation of the harm the pesticides cause salmon, said Kim Leval, executive director of the anti-pesticides group. That is how the last buffers expired.

Leval added that many fruit growers in the Columbia Basin have voluntarily implemented even larger buffer zones to protect salmon.

The EPA declined comment Friday.

The agency said in the Federal Register notice that it would accept public comments on the settlement for the next 30 days. There is no hard timetable for the permanent buffer regulations.

Buffers are currently in place for several other pesticides.

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Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

Source URL (retrieved on 04/27/2015 - 8:23am):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/06/epa-agrees-pesticide-buffers-protect-salmon>