

Fact Sheet on Senate Bill 683 A Bill to Strengthen Oregon's Pesticide Use Reporting

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-- Micheal McKillip, Regional Water Providers Consortium of the Portland area

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-- Karl Morgenstern, Eugene Water & Electric Board

BACKGROUND

Pesticides are widely used throughout Oregon on farms, roadsides, schools, parks, and homes. Despite conscientious efforts by applicators who apply pesticides according to federal requirements, these chemicals contaminate our water, air and even our bodies. For example, U.S. Geological Survey research from 2003 found 27 pesticides in the lower Clackamas River.

Public health, agricultural and water quality researchers have stated the need for accurate, detailed and specific pesticide use reporting data. Responding to this need, in 1999 the Oregon Legislature voted 88 to 2 to create a pesticide use reporting system (PURS). The law was designed to ***"ensure the public health and safety and to protect Oregon's water and environment."*** (ORS 634) The law requires commercial applicators, growers, and government to report the pesticides they use to the Oregon Department of Agriculture. They also must report when and in what amounts they use them and where they are applied.

While the law was passed in 1999, the program was not fully funded until 2005. **When funding was appropriated, the legislature changed the way data was reported.** The specificity of the location of agricultural pesticide applications was expanded from one square mile (township/range/section or 640 acres) to basins (third field Hydrologic Unit Codes) -- which are generally 5,000 to 15,000 square miles in size. The shift was to further protect the confidentiality of pesticide applicators and the people who own lands where pesticides are applied. Unfortunately, that shift made the data fairly useless to many researchers.

Senate Bill 683 proposes two simple fixes that maintain the confidentiality and improve the quality of data collected, making it more useful for public health researchers and drinking water providers. SB 683 would:

1. **Have the location of agricultural pesticide applications be reported by the ninety-seven watersheds that make up the state of Oregon.** Those watersheds are termed fourth field Hydrologic Unit Codes. These watersheds range from 129 square miles to 4,100 square miles in size.
2. **Restore detailed reporting of government pesticide applications.** Applications by and for the government would be reported by specific address or if not applicable by 1/4 section (1/2 mile by 1/2 mile). The confidentiality clause was never meant to obscure public record.

HOW SENATE BILL 683 AFFECTS OREGON WATER AND CITIZENS

Helps clean up Oregon's waters. The Portland Metropolitan Area's Regional Water Providers Consortium, providing water to over 1/3 of Oregon's residents, stated, "reporting based on 4th field HUC will be an excellent improvement to the PURS. The level of detail that the 4th field HUC will provide will make the data collected under PURS more meaningful to water providers as they work to have a better understanding of the amounts and types of pesticides being used in their local watersheds. The data will also help water providers evaluate risk, assess pesticide use trends, tailor monitoring programs and improve outreach." (Michael McKillip, Letter to Senator Brad Avakian, April 11, 2007)

Avoids worst-case assumptions that can lead to overly restrictive rules and regulations. In California, as compared to Oregon and Washington, regulators have imposed fewer buffer areas and restricted the use of a shorter list of pesticides in order to protect salmon, simply because California has a comprehensive and site-specific pesticide use reporting system.

According to the Drinking Water Source Protection Coordinator for the Eugene Water & Electric Board "[T]he current Pesticide Use Reporting System provides pesticide use based on a 3rd field hydrologic unit classification... This makes the [current] PURS a fairly useless tool to track pesticide use in the McKenzie Watershed. ... As a result we have relied on estimating pesticide use by applying 'typical' chemical application rates by crop type. **The method tends to overstate pesticide use and make agricultural and other uses appear more of a threat than actual pesticide use levels.**" (Karl Morgenstern, Letter to Senator Avakian, March 9, 2007).

Protects human health. According to Andy Harris, a medical doctor in Salem Oregon: "To get accurate patient histories, health care practitioners need access to information on human exposure to these chemicals. **The PUR system is an important step in the diagnosis and treatment of exposed patients, but data on the location of spraying needs to be as specific as possible. SB 683 is an important step in this direction.**" (Andy Harris MD, E-mail to Senator Avakian, April 2, 2007)

Helps farmers find appropriate pest management techniques. "The California Department of Food and Agriculture works ... to understand how pesticide regulation may affect pest management systems and the state's economy. California **Pesticide Use Report data are fundamental to these efforts** -- we use these data to track pest management trends and the percentage of particular commodity acreage that is being treated with the products under regulatory consideration or their alternatives." (John Steggall of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, e-mail to Aimee Code March 7, 2007).

For more information, including contacts for public health researchers and drinking water providers, contact Aimee Code, Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides,
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