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Subject: EPA Message on Tolerance Evaluations & NRDC Allegations

EPA Pesticide Program Update
 from EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs 08/07/02
<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides>

IN THIS UPDATE:

Note to Correspondents

1)SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON PESTICIDE TOLERANCE EVALUATIONS

On Friday, Aug. 2, EPA announced that it had met a significant milestone for food safety by reassessing more than 6,400 allowable pesticide residues on food (called tolerances) to ensure that they satisfy the tougher food safety standard contained in the Food Quality Protection Act of 1996. Reaching this goal was accomplished through an exhaustive scientific and regulatory effort involving key stakeholders throughout the process.

Unfortunately, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), who has worked closely with EPA on this issue, has recently disseminated misinformation rather than facts. EPA would like to set the record straight.

1). NRDC is alleging that the Agency has falsely claimed to have met the statutory deadline for pesticide tolerance reassessment.

EPA has indeed met the Congressionally-mandated deadlines in the Food Quality Protection Act of 1996 to reassess two-thirds of the existing pesticide tolerances on food to ensure they meet the tougher health standards required by law. This has been accomplished through a multi-year process that has included numerous rounds of scientific and public review.

2.) In an especially inappropriate and inaccurate charge, NRDC characterized EPA's approach to tolerance reassessment as involving "Enron like accounting."

This kind of blatantly charged language is wholly without merit and profoundly unfair to the dedicated EPA staff and the many stakeholders who have invested valuable time and energy into making tolerance reassessment a success. EPA stands by the integrity of this program. The methods used to determine when a tolerance has completed the reassessment process are accurate, time-tested and open for full

scrutiny throughout.

3). NRDC claims that the Agency has failed to review the high priority pesticides.

Since 1996, the Agency has worked under a systematic approach that prioritizes for reassessment and risk mitigation specific pesticides that may pose the greatest risks to public health. In a consent agreement signed in 2001, NRDC agreed with EPA to an aggressive schedule to reassess certain pesticides of particular concern. To date, EPA has successfully met all the deadlines for expeditious review of the priority pesticides in that agreement, and the Agency is on track to meet the remaining deadlines for the additional pesticides. In addition, EPA prioritized the evaluation of pesticide uses that involve children's food, and has completed the reassessment for approximately two-thirds of those tolerances. These actions reflect the true record ? focusing on the potentially riskiest pesticides first. This represents a major accomplishment for food safety, and one for which the public should be assured that the US continues to have among the safest food supplies in the world.

Another major advance in pesticide regulation was met in December 2001 when EPA released a preliminary cumulative risk assessment for the organophosphates ? a monumental scientific and regulatory accomplishment. After additional public and scientific review, the Agency issued a revised cumulative risk assessment in June, ahead of schedule. The issuance of these documents meets our legal obligations under the NRDC consent decree for issuing a preliminary and revised cumulative risk assessment for the organophosphate pesticides. EPA will continue to expeditiously evaluate the remaining organophosphates and other high priority pesticides. The Agency will continue the important work to ensure all pesticides meet the tough scientific and regulatory standards in the Food Quality Protection Act of 1996.

4.) NRDC even goes so far as to assert that by releasing the press statement on Friday afternoon, the Agency is somehow avoiding public scrutiny.

Quite the contrary, the Agency had been working diligently to meet the statutory deadline of Aug. 3. Our announcement reflected the completion of three years of work and was released on Friday because the deadline fell on a Saturday. EPA is very proud of the concerted efforts to accomplish this task.

In conclusion, EPA, along with the public, industry, growers, consumer groups, states, the public health community and others, have all worked diligently to implement FQPA using a transparent, open process, with sound scientific principles, while meeting statutory deadlines with integrity. As always, EPA's primary focus and unwavering commitment continues to be the protection of public health and the environment for the American people.

