

Look at 'highly exposed' segment proposed . . .

PARC shifts study emphasis

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SALEM, Ore. — The Pesticide Analytical Research Center (PARC) has rejected a "retrospective type of study" of the pesticide problem in coastal counties of Oregon as outlined in a report made by the U.S. Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Ga.

In a change of direction, PARC members decided to study a proposal to be made by Oregon State University on the effect of the pesticide 2,4-D "on highly exposed people in Eastern Oregon and the Willamette Valley."

That proposal is due at the next meeting of the group, Jan. 30, at which time they will also consider a report of pesticide studies made by Dr. James Goggin of the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center, Portland.

Maria Gillam, Eugene, of the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, suggested PARC study "the rise and distribution of the use of chemicals in Oregon."

The action came after a morning of technical discussion on pesticides by a group of 15 scientists last Thursday at the Oregon Department of Agriculture, under direction of Bill Kosesan, administrator of the department plant division and chairman of PARC.

Warren Westgarth of the Department of Environmental Quality, made the original motion. He said he did so "after looking at all the data in the CDC report" and with the hope something could be going from the center before the summer applications of pesticides.

Larry Edmunds, epidemiologist with the disease control center at Atlanta, said the

pesticide study he outlined would require \$100,000 in funding from the state of Oregon. He said the CDC is not a funding group, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would not contribute, but the U.S. Forest Service could have some funds. Edmunds estimated total cost of the proposed study at \$132,000.

Edmunds said birth defects among children born in Oregon runs lower than the national average but two counties have defects significantly higher than the U.S. average.

A pilot study by the Atlanta CDC was done in Lincoln, Benton and Polk counties on use of 2,4-D in primarily forested areas. Based on the Oregon rate of central nervous system birth defects from the Birth Defects Monitoring Program data, it was estimated 264 cases could be located and interviewed in Western Oregon.

Specifically, the study design rejected by PARC was "A retrospective matched case-control study, in-depth personal interviews would be conducted of 264 central nervous system cases and 264 normal controls to evaluate various maternal and paternal risk factors. With adequate staff, the work could have been completed in nine to 18 months.

The report states that a reliable, unbiased estimate of exposure to 2,4-D would be needed for both cases and controls. Because birth defects are rare events, it would be difficult to obtain enough cases for a study with sufficient statistical power, other than in a retrospective study.

Edmunds said the CDC report is "only an outline of an

approach to the problem." During the discussion, he said the proposed further study has some advantages but there may be more disadvantages and there is no need to make a study for the sake of a study.

Mike Newton, professor of forest ecology at OSU, ~~commented throughout his remarks~~ that the CDC pilot study hypothesis blaming 2,4-D in coastal county birth defect problems is erroneous.

He said use of 2,4-D is a national problem and in many farming areas the use is much greater than in the timbered coastal community. He cited widespread roadside weed and brush use of 2,4-D and other herbicides.

Newton questioned whether the incidence of coastal defects is extraordinary and said birth defects in the region may

be due to other causes such as high phosphate levels in soils and excessive rates of mercury and copper in water supplies at the coast.

He said a study of residents in urban areas at the coast — well removed from timber — showed that 17 percent of the population had high residues of 2,4-D in their urine.

"A study, if it is positive, would show defects but they would be subject to other variable causes than herbicides. We don't know what causes defects. There is only a 50 percent chance of picking up herbicide effects with a study," said Newton.

He said there is a 10,000-to-1 safety factor in herbicide applications. "Drugs, alcohol, etc., show birth defects in users, such confounding factors are large and will confuse the study," Newton continued.

Gillam said "lots of citizens

are angry" about 2,4-D applications and warned that "sooner or later you must look at use of herbicides."

James Witt, agricultural Extension specialist in chemistry, OSU, proposed looking at positive controls for birth defects due to 2,4-D.

Virgil Freed, head of the agricultural chemistry department at OSU, called for a study of possible defects among husbands and wives who have used pesticides on family farms in Morrow and Umatilla counties, for many continuous years.

Dr. Stringham, family physician in Lincoln County, suggested both fathers and mothers should be studied for birth defects.

The Pesticide Analytical Research Center consists of representatives from the state departments of Agriculture, Health Division, Environmental Quality, Forestry and Fish & Game. One member from the public at large is appointed by the governor.

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