



MONTEREY COUNTY

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER

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Media Update: AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER ASSEMBLES TEAM OF EXPERTS AS PILOT PROJECT TO PROVIDE PESTICIDE INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS MOVES FORWARD

Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner Eric Lauritzen has assembled a team of experts to launch a pilot project which will create a model program focused on enhancing protections when agricultural pesticides are used near schools. The pilot project, which is the first of its kind in the nation and announced at a press conference in May, will receive \$75,000 from the state to launch a website for parents, teachers and the community to access information about pesticide use on farms.

The team of experts assembled by Lauritzen includes:

- Traci Townsend-Gieg, a non-profit health care professional who has overseen projects examining pesticide exposure and the effects on reproductive health of farm workers as well as directed pilot implementation of a clinical pesticide exposure risk assessment tool;
- Dr. Joanne Perron, an OB-GYN who earned a master's degree in public health from the University of California, Berkeley;
- Stephanie McMurtrie, specializing in health programs, research and facilitation and holding a master's degree in health science from John Hopkins University; and,
- Lea Brooks, former assistant director of communications for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR).

While state and local pesticide rules have long provided special safeguards for schools and other sensitive sites, the Monterey County pilot project will enhance access to information related to pesticide use in the general vicinity of schools. Three Pajaro Valley Unified District schools – Ohlone and Hall District Elementary and Pajaro Middle School – will receive five days advance notice for any fumigant pesticide application within one quarter mile of each school.

Townsend-Gieg and McMurtrie's primary focus is to develop and implement a community outreach plan to determine content and approach to provide notification to schools and families. "The cornerstone of our outreach tools will be the bilingual website," explains Townsend-Gieg. "But we want to ensure that we provide useful and accessible information about pesticide use on farms for the families with children who attend the pilot project schools as well as our local community." Pending launch of the website, schools will be directly notified by County Staff of any fumigation within ¼ mile of any of the three pilot schools.

Dr. Perron serves as Lauritzen's public health adviser and will provide needed information and support to ensure all health information presented on the bilingual website is factual and science-based. Perron will also liaison with local health officials as well as outside experts to help address health-related questions from parents, teachers and the community.

Brooks is charged with drafting website content. Because of her experience at CDPR, Brooks brings a unique understanding of pesticide-related issues and regulations as well as how to communicate effectively with California residents about sometimes complex topics.

"This team has been working hard over the last month to move this project forward. With their unique skill set, I am confident that this pilot project will achieve its objective of an effective, efficient and transparent approach to providing information about pesticide use on farms," Lauritzen says.

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