

The science is clear; the solution is more complex

By Dr. Lee Evslin - Other Voices | Tuesday, April 4, 2017, 12:15 a.m.

A recent Honolulu Civil Beat article was entitled “Calling Out Anti-Science Denialists.” The implication of the article is that it is “anti-scientific” to be concerned about the toxicity of pesticides and that further regulation is not necessary. The following is a summary of my response as published in Civil Beat.

Please find below some of the science that should make us all concerned. (For the record, I was one of the two physicians who worked on the Joint Fact Finding report.)

1. The American Academy Of Pediatrics and the American College of OB-GYN have position papers expressing their concerns about pesticides. There is particular concern about chronic low-level exposure particularly to the fetus and the young child. These exposures can be from food, household spraying and/or agricultural spraying.
2. Project TENDR consists of leading North American “scientific and medical experts.” They state, “We are witnessing an alarming increase in learning and behavioral problems in children.” They state that there has been a 17 percent increase in developmental disabilities in just the past 10 years. Pesticides also lead their list of environmental toxins of concern.
3. A UN Panel of experts presented a scathing report to the UN on March 8, 2017. They were highly critical of the global corporations that manufacture pesticides. This is obviously a controversial report.
4. Well-respected studies done by universities in California are showing increases in autism, decreases in IQ, and increases in behavioral disorders in the children of mothers who were pregnant and lived near agricultural spraying or worked in agriculture. Some of these studies have correlated these adverse findings with finding pesticide metabolites in the urine of the mothers under study.

5. The prestigious, long-running Agricultural Health Study has shown associations between agricultural pesticide use and cancer, Parkinson's disease, endocrine disorders, asthma, neurologic disorders and a variety of other diseases.

6. Chlorpyrifos is the second most heavily sprayed RUP (restricted use pesticide) on Kauai. It is a known neurotoxin and considered particularly dangerous to the unborn child. Last year the federal Environmental Protection Agency called for prohibiting its use in the U.S. due to concerns about its toxic nature, worker safety, and contaminating surface water. The EPA has also announced that at normal levels of spraying it is likely to "adversely affect" 97 percent of endangered species. A final EPA decision on the recommended prohibition is due at the end of this month.

The author of the Civil Beat article also criticized the state-sponsored Joint Fact Finding (JFF) report for "fear mongering." The JFF report clearly states that the West Kauai communities are unhealthy communities by many of the measures available for review. The report further states that association does not prove causality. It says that other factors, which may include socio-economic factors, may be the cause of the ill health. It concludes that if there is real interest in knowing if pesticides are adversely affecting the community, there should be environmental testing for pesticides in the soil, house dust and surface water with associated biologic monitoring.

As mentioned in the title of this article, the science is clear, compelling and worrisome. The solutions are obviously much more complex.

The problem is how do we move forward now to protect the public and not discourage farming and food self-sufficiency?

I believe that the JFF recommendations are good steps. (It should be noted that these recommendations are similar to regulations in place in California and to the recommendations made by our Kauai state representatives in a recent op-ed article in The Garden Island.) The recommendations include:

1. Expand the current Kauai-based good neighbor policy to the entire state and make it verifiable and mandatory.
2. Establish science-based buffer zones around sensitive areas. These would not be uniform and we may be able to use California's efforts in this direction as a prototype. The results of the environmental testing could also play a role in establishing these buffers.

3. Provide for environmental monitoring in communities that may be at risk for exposure to pesticides. This would mean environmental testing of house dust, soil, surface water and perhaps biologic monitoring of populations at particular risk, such as pregnant women.

4. The JFF called for expanding the pesticide oversight committee which is now under the state Department of Agriculture. A recommendation has been made that such a committee would be better served under the state Department of Health. This is probably a good idea.

5. I believe that reporting should be by the larger agricultural companies which are using large amounts of RUPs. Golf courses and termite companies should also report. The bills should clearly exclude farms using minimal to no RUPs.

6. There will be increasing international pressure to include non-RUPs such as glyphosate (Roundup), 2,4-D, and pyrethroids in the disclosure statements. I believe that at the very least the annual amounts of these pesticides should be disclosed by all government organizations and by all companies who use these chemicals over a certain threshold.

7. There should be public notice of all pesticide spraying in parks and in other areas where children might play.

Good legislation is a win for all parties because it can help protect the public and hopefully make all parties feel listened to.

The responsibility for pesticide regulations has been clearly placed in the hands of the state legislators. This article was written when it appeared that legislation on this issue might actually pass this year. The passing of meaningful legislation now appears much less likely and that is a loss for all parties. It is particularly a loss for the residents of the communities at risk.

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