



“From the Director”

Brian R. Leahy, Director
Department of Pesticide Regulation

May 27, 2015

Hello,

As you may know, DPR will hold a series of statewide public workshops to hear ideas about how to address concerns about the use of pesticides around schools from May 28 - June 9 2015.

I wanted to be sure that you saw this op-ed that was recently published in the Sacramento Bee. You can find more information on existing Regulation of Pesticides Used at or Near Schools [here](#).

Schoolkids must be protected from pesticides

California is the nation’s most populated state and its farmers are the most productive. The result is that farms are frequently located near where people work and live.

To address some of the challenges that proximity creates, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation will be hosting a series of public workshops, starting Thursday in Sacramento, to help us create new rules.

Most farms are industrial by nature, with dangerous equipment, noise, dust and chemicals, including pesticides. We want children to be safe in our schools, yet because land use is a local affair, school locations are exempt from the General Plan and other measures designed to ensure thoughtful planning. As a result, schools are sometimes built on prime agricultural land in the middle of existing farm operations. What kind of logic is that?

Modern farms **rely on pesticides, and so it is our department’s responsibility** to create strong regulations to keep schoolchildren and staff safe. California has the most protective regulations in the nation, building upon **the federal Environmental Protection Agency’s pesticide program.**

Because our children can never be too safe, I have asked my staff to draft a new statewide regulation to focus on what must occur when a farm near a school wants to apply pesticides. It will clearly define the responsibilities

of the farmers, detail the information that must be given to schools and add restrictions on pesticides used when schoolchildren are present.

There are two keys to a successful statewide strategy: good communication and reasonable restrictions. Our goal is to adopt a consistent policy to address these two key concerns.

Our regulation will build on measures in some counties that are enforced by agricultural commissioners, who conduct about 19,000 pesticide inspections a year. Their vigilance has helped to keep thousands of schoolchildren safe, and the new policy will further strengthen their efforts.

Creating the new regulation will be a two-step process. The first: community workshops in Sacramento, Salinas, Ventura, Oxnard, Lamont and Riverside. The second: a formal rulemaking process that, though lengthy, will allow plenty of opportunity for dialogue and comment from farmers, school administrators, parents and teachers.

Pesticides elicit strong emotions, and writing a balanced regulation that is practical and meaningful is not likely to be easy. Farmers have the right to use pesticides safely to grow the food that California and much of the country relies on. But Californians want to know what chemicals are being applied in their neighborhoods, and what is used to grow their food.

This regulation will achieve that balance when schools are next to farms.

Brian R. Leahy is director of the California Department of Pesticide Regulation.