

Pesticide Use Tops 161 Million Pounds in 1991

By Don Villarejo

More than 161 million pounds of pesticide were sprayed or otherwise applied in California in 1991, according to the latest California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) survey of reported use throughout the state. Nearly 90 percent of these materials were employed in the production of agricultural commodities.

Compared with 1990 figures, the results represent a decrease of 20 million pounds in the total amount of reported active ingredients used. It is likely that this reduction is a direct result of smaller planted acreage in 1991, a by-product of the prolonged California drought. Direct comparisons of 1991 overall totals, or county-by-county totals, with those for years prior to 1990 is not possible because of major changes in reporting requirements: 1990 was the first year in which *all* pesticide use had to be reported. The new rule is usually referred to as "100 percent reporting." Previously, private applicators (farmers) needed only to report their use of restricted materials, i.e., those pesticides thought to be the most dangerous. Thus, comparisons of the reported use of restricted materials in the state are still meaningful.

According to DPR, there were more than 2.75 million use reports filed in 1991, compared with 823,000 in 1988, the last year for which published data exists on reports submitted under the old system. The 100 percent reporting requirement has led to a more than threefold increase in the volume of reports. Farmers, staff of the counties' agricultural commissioners, and DPR staff find them-

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selves flooded with paper. It is also estimated that an additional 15,000 farmers now file reports, an increase of 38 percent over prior years.

In 1988, under the limited-use reporting system, farmers reported over 105 million pounds of pesticide. The 50 percent increase between 1988 and 1991 can be attributed partially to the inclusion of non-restricted pesticide use, although there are also some notable changes in the reported use of certain restricted materials.

Three crops accounted for 57 million pounds of pesticide, or roughly one-third of total reported use. They are, in order of amount (in millions of pounds): grapes (37.6), cotton (10.4), and sugar beets (8.7).

workers commonly report on-the-job injury due to sulfur dust exposure.

COUNTIES REPORTING MOST PESTICIDE USE

FRESNO 23.3

KERN 17.6

TULARE 12.4

CROPS REPORTING MOST PESTICIDE USE

GRAPES 37.6

COTTON 10.4

SUGAR BEETS 8.7

Three California counties lead the entire United States in the amount of agricultural production (based on cash receipts paid to farmers for the sale of agricultural commodities). They also lead the state in pesticide use. These counties are, in order (in millions of pounds): Fresno County (23.3), Kern County (17.6), Tulare County (12.4).

Copies of the printed reports are available in two volumes, one indexed by commodity, the second by chemical. To order, send \$25 to: Cashier, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, Information Services Branch, 1220 N Street, P.O. Box 942871, Sacramento, CA 94271-0001. For information on the availability and cost of the full computerized data base of all the individual reports, call the DPR Information Services Branch, (916) 654-1353. ❖

Sulfur ranked as the most-used pesticide, at 49.5 million pounds. Since it is a naturally occurring chemical element, sulfur is considered organic, although agricultural