

## **TOXIC PESTICIDE APPROVED FOR STRAWBERRIES IN CALIFORNIA<sup>1</sup>**

**Jake Richardson**©

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation approved the use of methyl iodide for strawberry farmers this week. The pesticide is a fumigant that kills insects, weeds and bacteria. There is also research showing it causes cancer in rats and mice. The EPA's website says, "In rats that received subcutaneous injections, subcutaneous sarcomas and pulmonary metastases were reported. An increased incidence of lung tumors was reported in mice exposed to high levels of methyl iodide by intraperitoneal injection." (Source: EPA.gov)

The California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment published a document listing the type of toxicity for methyl iodide as "cancer." The 2008 document's title is Chemicals Known to the State to Cause Cancer or Reproductive Toxicity. The EPA also says chronic inhalation of the pesticide may impact the human central nervous system. Skin contact for long periods can cause burns in animals and humans, though the length of time to cause burns is not specified. A material safety data sheet, which is a document used by people who handle chemicals regularly such as lab workers, states skin burns can occur on contact. If inhaled for longer periods, it can cause, "pallor, giddiness, dizziness, ataxia, sleepiness, irritability, drowsiness, incoordination, slurred speech, muscular twitching, and even death." (Source: Sciencelab.com) Ingestion causes vomiting, abdominal pain, nausea, and diarrhea. It can also be fatal.

The Pesticide Action Network of North America says 125 pounds per acre of methyl iodide would be applied by farm workers in a gas form. This method of application is hard to control and would result in some groundwater contamination. So it is possible that farm workers, those who live near the strawberry fields, those who use the groundwater and strawberry consumers could be negatively impacted by use of methyl iodide. (Not to mention potential impacts on wildlife living near strawberry fields.)

The range of strawberry growing lands covers 500 miles — from San Diego to San Francisco. Strawberries are grown almost year round in California, and the state produces 80 percent of the strawberries grown in the United States. Joanne Perron, MD wrote this recently on pesticides in strawberries: "Even low levels of some pesticides have been shown to disrupt human hormonal, neurological, and immune functioning. Because of their underdeveloped detoxifying mechanisms, and other factors the most vulnerable humans are the developing fetus, babies, and children." (Source: sfgate.com)

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<sup>1</sup> Care2, healthy & green living, December 03, 2010