

State fines company over Curry County herbicides

By **JEFF BARNARD**, Associated Press <http://www.ap.org/newsvalues/index.html>

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GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — The state Tuesday fined a southern Oregon helicopter company for providing false and misleading information during the investigation into complaints that herbicides meant for timberlands in Curry County fell over nearby residents, making some of them sick.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture said Tuesday that it fined Pacific Air Research, Inc., of White City and pesticide applicator Steven Owen \$10,000 each and suspended their commercial pesticide licenses for a year. Owen and the company did not immediately return a call for comment.

Department spokesman Bruce Pokarney said Owen has asked for an administrative appeal.

"This was probably the most difficult and complex case we have ever done within our pesticides program," and the penalties the maximum possible, Pokarney said.

The case dates from October 2013, when 15 people in the Cedar Valley area north of Gold Beach complained they got sick after herbicides being sprayed on nearby commercial timberlands drifted over their homes. The symptoms they reported included respiratory problems, stomach cramps, headaches, swelling of hands and eyes, and rashes.

Cedar Valley resident John Burns, assistant chief of the local volunteer fire department, said he and the others were happy that the fines and license suspensions were levied. He said they remained frustrated over the state's regulatory process, particularly the long time it took to let people know what pesticides were involved so they could get medical treatment.

Burns said some residents and their animals were still having health problems because whenever the fog rolls in, it activates the herbicide, making them experience symptoms.

Pokarney said Owen and the company initially provided false records leading investigators to believe the common herbicide glyphosate, sold as RoundUp, was used, but tests of vegetation ultimately showed the pesticides 2,4-D and trycloprr were in the spray mix.

Other potential violations revealed by the investigation would be addressed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, he said. They include allowing pesticides to fall on properties other than the intended spray site, and applying a heavier dose than instructed on the label guidelines when spraying one of the commercial timberland sites.

"If we had gotten accurate information in a timely fashion from the get go, this thing could have been wrapped up very quickly and we could have provided the best information to the community," Pokarney said. "We do know we need to do a better job of communication with the community in cases like this."

Lisa Arkin of the pesticides watchdog group Beyond Toxics said the overspray could have been prevented if earlier complaints about the operator had been prosecuted as fully by the department.

Associated Press (<http://www.ap.org>)

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