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Oregon drops fine for pilot in herbicide overspray

By JEFF BARNARD, Associated Press Published 6:35 pm, Thursday, July 2, 2015

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GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — The Oregon Department of Agriculture has waived \$20,000 in fines for a helicopter pilot and a company named in an investigation into herbicides being sprayed over timberlands in Curry County.

The department announced Wednesday a settlement agreement with Steven Owen, owner and pilot for Pacific Air Research Based in White City.

Under the agreement, he gives up his pesticides applicator license for a year, and does not dispute findings that he provided investigators false and misleading information. He can apply for a new license in a year if he has no new violations.

Department director Katy Coba said in a statement the economic losses from losing the license are greater than the fine.

"We realize the citizens affected by the actions of

Pacific air Research were concerned about this company continuing its aerial applications," the statement said. "Our number one priority was to have an immediate surrender of the applicator and operator license."

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Owen did not return a call to his business.

John Burns, one of the 15 people in the Cedar Valley north of Gold Beach who initially complained in October 2013 of health problems after being sprayed, said he was disappointed with the fines being waived.

"Why does the industry have the right to govern themselves?" he said. "No one is holding them accountable to the decisions they make."

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Meanwhile, a bill increasing controls on aerial pesticide spraying inspired by the case passed the Oregon House and Senate this week and heads to Gov. [Kate Brown](#). The bill would impose Oregon's first aerial spraying buffers around homes and schools, with violators subject to criminal and civil penalties. It also would establish a state pesticide hotline.

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. They reported respiratory problems, stomach cramps, headaches, swelling of hands and eyes and rashes.

State investigators determined Owen "more than likely" allowed some spray to fall over people's homes, but came to no conclusions about whether the small amounts found on the ground could account for people's health complaints.

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 tryclopyr were in the spray mix, investigators said.

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