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Oregon Lawmakers Consider Ban On Pesticide Chlorpyrifos

by **Tony Schick** (</contributor/tony-schick/>) [Follow](#) OPB March 26, 2019 6:01 p.m.

Oregon lawmakers heard testimony Tuesday on a set of bills that would restrict pesticide use in an attempt to protect both humans and the insects that pollinate our crops.

House Bill 3058 (<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Measures/Overview/HB3058>) and Senate Bill 853, (<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Measures/Overview/SB853>) nearly identical, would ban all uses of the insecticide known as chlorpyrifos within Oregon. The bills also would add a commonly used group of insecticides, known as neonicotinoids, to a list of restricted pesticides that can only be applied with a state-issued license.

In December, OPB reported the widespread use of chlorpyrifos in the Pacific Northwest (<https://www.opb.org/news/article/toxic-pesticide-christmas-tree-harmful-children/>) on crops from apples to Christmas trees, despite concerns from federal scientists about its harmful effects.

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Environmental Protection Agency scientists recommended banning chlorpyrifos because of its potential harm to children and farmworkers, but the agency decided against a ban after President Donald Trump took office. In the months after the EPA decided against banning it, people continued to complain about pollution and poisoning related to chlorpyrifos in Oregon and Washington.

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If either bill passes the Legislature, Oregon would join California and Hawaii as states that have moved to restrict the use of chlorpyrifos in the absence of a federal ban. The EPA's decision has been challenged by environmental groups and is pending in federal court.

Many Northwest farmers consider chlorpyrifos important to their operations. Alternatives to the chemical exist, and more are in development, but opponents of the ban say none of them are as

affordable or effective on so many different crops and insects.

Bob Schaefer, CEO of the the Noble Mountain tree farm based in Salem, Oregon, said the loss of chlorpyrifos would devastate his industry's ability to export Christmas trees, which he said has generated hundreds of thousands of dollars for his business in the past few years.

Some countries, such as Mexico, have strict pest-control rules on imported trees.

"If we are not able to spray with chlorpyrifos prior to shipping, we will lose this entire market segment," Schaefer said.

Brenda Frketich, a nut and grass seed farmer from St. Paul, Oregon, said she has used chlorpyrifos safely and avoided harm to her three young children.

"I am a mom who wants her children to be safe, and I am a farmer who strives for crop and soil health. This is one tool that when used per the label, I can satisfy human and environmental safety at the same time," she told lawmakers.

Environmental groups have wanted chlorpyrifos banned for more than 10 years.

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"EPA scientists reviewed thousands of studies and examined the hundreds of ways that chlorpyrifos may be used under current law," said Tyler Smith of EarthJustice, one of the groups that sued over the agency's decision not to ban the chemical. "They

found all of these uses result in unsafe level of exposure, even when the handlers follow all of the directions on the pesticide label.”

The chemical has been linked to diminished IQ levels, higher rates of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder and impulsive behavior in children who have been exposed. It can also be acutely toxic to farmworkers exposed at higher doses. It is already banned for household use.

The proposed Oregon legislation would similarly ban neonicotinoid pesticides in household use, limiting them to licensed pesticide applicators only. Neonicotinoids have been of particular concern for populations of bees and other pollinators.

“Oregon is renowned for its bounty of fruits and vegetables,” said Kristina LeFever, president of the nonprofit Pollinator Project Rogue Valley. “What will farmers do this year and the next and the next as the insects that pollinate our crops disappear?”

However, several Oregon farmers testified during a hearing in the Senate Committee On Environment and Natural Resources that such a restriction could be a burden on farmers who do not have such a license, but are currently allowed to apply the insecticides to their own fields.

Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, chair of the Senate committee, said during the hearing that the intent of the legislation was simply to restrict use to farmers, and that he would be discussing with fellow lawmakers how to proceed.

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