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Oregon Lawmakers Consider Stronger Oversight Of Aerial Herbicide Spraying

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The yellow helicopter belonging to Steve Owen of Pacific Air Research was at the center of an investigation into alleged overspray during an aerial herbicide application onto forestland near Oregon's southern coast. | credit: Oregon Department of Agriculture | *rollover image for more*

SALEM, Ore. — Oregon lawmakers are considering new rules to better protect the public from aerial herbicide spraying.

The Senate Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources met Monday in response to a case on state's southern coast, where dozens of people in the community of Cedar Valley claimed nearby forest spraying this past fall made them sick. Several residents traveled to attend the meeting and sat in the front row as lawmakers deliberated.

In April an [EarthFix investigation revealed the state's system for pesticide regulation](#) fails to provide residents adequate notice about nearby spraying and that its responses to pesticide complaints are rife with miscommunication and incapable of answering questions about human exposure. After demanding in May that state agencies improve their response to such complaints, lawmakers on Monday questioned whether regulators need more authority to prevent aerial spraying from becoming a problem.

"My question is, do you need more tools?" Senator Alan Bates, D-Medford, asked of officials from the Department of Forestry who testified before the committee.

Similarly, Rep. Ann Lininger, D-Lake Oswego, asked the Department of Agriculture whether the state should establish a new database tracking what pesticides are actually applied.

"That's got to be a conversation that happens in these halls," Oregon Department of Agriculture Director Katy Coba said after the meeting. "That's a pretty significant policy discussion. It would require a statutory change in order to do that."

Bates said he was dissatisfied with the agencies' responses to questions from lawmakers, and that he hopes for legislation in the next session.

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“The people in the front row who had been affected by this, they were not looking real happy,” Bates said. “They felt that government’s failing them. I think we have a responsibility to take care of this.”

Residents from the area said most of all they wanted accountability, and would like to see changes in the laws if necessary.

“We just want to make sure it’s going forward in a way that we’re not ignored,” said John Burns, 67, of Cedar Valley. “If legislation has to change, absolutely, but first of all and most importantly, that it’s not just swept under the rug.”

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Cedar Valley herbicides Oregon Department of Forestry Oregon Department of Agriculture forestry

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Ray Kinney · 2 months ago

I defies logic to keep pesticide application records from medical and public access. It only furthers the taking of 'false profits' by big corporations at the expense of citizen physical wellbeing. Corporate externalized costs onto the citizens are an obomination in 2014. An Independent system of labs, as free as possible, to investigate chemical trespass incidents, and environmental toxicology for the salmon recovery effort, should be formed and empowered to clarify these issues. Corporations should have to fund this process through TAXES, yes taxes! Corporations would just add these costs onto their products and service charges, but at least the needed environmental monitoring to protect our citizens and wildlife would have been accomplished so that we would not have to continue having to repeatedly pay for our mistakes over and over into the future. Monitoring SAVES money, far more than it costs.

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