

EPA's next round against atrazine

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will hold the next in a series of new Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) meetings to re-review the science on the important herbicide atrazine, the week of April 26, in Washington, D.C.

Used on most corn, sorghum and sugar cane acres, atrazine is valued for its versatile applications in controlling weeds, while acting very gently on the land.

After a half-century of safe use, atrazine is a fresh target for class-action litigation. The lawsuits have emerged in tandem with new health claims from activist groups like the NRDC, which has ginned up a slick, well-funded campaign to convince regulators that the federal limit on atrazine in water (three parts per billion) isn't low enough. This is despite the fact that health authorities around the world -- including the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Canada and the World Health Organization -- have all given atrazine a clean bill of health.

Not only is it safe to use, but as many observe Earth Day on April 22, it's important to remember that atrazine helps the environment. By employing conservation tillage practices, farmers who use atrazine to control weeds reduce soil runoff and the number of tractor trips across their fields. That prevents soil erosion, improves water quality, and cuts down greenhouse gas emissions.

Many EPA watchers are deeply concerned that this new re-review signals an unprecedented war on agriculture by anti-pesticide activists. Why? Atrazine has been determined over and over again to be a beneficial and safe herbicide.

The subject of more than 6,000 studies, atrazine was recently registered as safe to use by the EPA after a dozen years of scientific inquiry. It is believed by many in the farm community that atrazine is a test case for activists. If they can sow enough unfounded fear and turn public opinion against a product as clearly safe to use as atrazine, virtually any technology used by farmers will be open game for those in Washington who share their anti-pesticide agenda.

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