For Immediate Release: June 11, 2012

Contacts: Asael Sala, Pesticide Watch (916) 670-0529
Kim Glazzard, Organic Sacramento (916) 455-8415

PESTICIDES BEING PROPOSED FOR AERIAL SPRAYING OVER SOUTH SACRAMENTO COUNTY AMONG THE MOST TOXIC

Despite public outcry, the Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito Vector Control District proposes aerial spraying covering 30,000 acres with an insecticide linked to neurodevelopment problems

Sacramento – The Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito Vector Control District (SYMVCD) announced late last week that they would conduct aerial spraying over Southern Sacramento County with toxic insecticides designed to kill adult mosquitoes as a means to control the spread of West Nile virus (WNv). However, the District has not been effective in dealing with the root cause of the problem and continues to insist on using ineffective toxic methods to eradicate adult mosquitoes, such as proposing to use organophosphates which have been linked to neurodevelopmental issues and other health problems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says that it is illegal to call these pesticides safe. In fact, they are designed to kill. In the past, the SYMVCD has relied heavily on Evergreen 6-60, which is composed of pyrethrin and piperonyl butoxide (PBO). This year they are proposing an even more dangerous and toxic pesticide to kill adult mosquitoes – organophosphates.

Organophosphates (OPs) are similar to the chemical warfare agents produced during World War II and are some of the most common and most toxic insecticides used today, adversely affecting the human nervous system even at low levels of exposure. Symptoms of acute exposure include nausea, headaches, twitching, trembling, excessive salivation and tearing, inability to breathe because of paralysis of the diaphragm, convulsions, and at higher doses, death.

Developing fetuses and children are the most susceptible to OPs. Children can be exposed to OPs through the air, food, soil, dust, carpets, and pets. Research also shows a range of neurodevelopmental problems associated with prenatal and early childhood exposure, such as impaired short term memory and mental development, abnormal reflexes, and mental and emotional problems.

For decades, the SYMVCD has used effective non-chemical controls to stop the spread of infected mosquitoes and scientific research has done little to support the case for large-scale aerial pesticide spraying. Many experts consider aerial spraying to be a “band-aid solution” and urge the SYMVCD to utilize integrated pest management science that stops the spread of the disease at the source and is safe. Local residents, however, have almost no voice in the handling of their health concerns, and have been systematically been ignored by the District.

Local advocates and experts oppose the regular spraying of pesticides over populated areas to kill adult mosquitoes “adulticiding” because they say it does not work in eliminating the problem, is toxic to humans and the environment, and exacerbates the problem by killing beneficial

insects and other natural mosquito predators. Furthermore, they assert that public officials have exaggerated the threat of WNv in an attempt to justify their spray protocol.

“Scientific research and mathematical modeling has proven that spraying is ineffective because mosquito populations quickly rebound to their prior levels. A sensible public policy would eschew adulticiding and emphasize instead careful water management and targeting of mosquito larvae, as some other cities do,” says Jack Milton, a local advocate with Stop West Nile Spraying Now and a Professor at UC Davis.

Officials in other cities across the nation, such as Washington, D.C. have implemented safe and effective biological controls to deal with the spred of WNv infection. Our nation’s capitol decided not to spray adulticides, citing specific research demonstrating that adulticiding is not effective and poses threats to public health. In fact, the disease has receded rapidly in that area over the past several years and health experts credit the region’s relatively low toll to a well-coordinated campaign to raise public awareness about prevention and applying larvicide to targeted areas. However, even with this lack of efficacy the SYMVCD refuses to resurrect its program of development of safe and effective biological controls. And, the public has virtually no say in the District’s decision.

There are few places for the public to voice concerns about pesticide spraying. Although the SYMVCD is made up of people appointed from various cities in Sacramento and Yolo counties, most of the members consistently have ignored public outcry.

“There is substantial scientific evidence that proves aerial spraying does not stop the spread of West Nile virus”, says Asael Sala, a community organizer with Pesticide Watch, an environmental group based in Sacramento. “There are least toxic methods and integrated pest management practices that would be more effective in dealing with the root cause of the problem. Relying on aerial spraying of toxic pesticides is an outdated and dangerous way of dealing with WNv at the expense of the public’s health.”

The Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito Vector Control District (SYMVCD) is scheduled to conduct aerial spraying covering 30,000 acres in Southern Sacramento County tonight and Tuesday night.

###