

CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION FARMWORKER PROTECTION FROM PESTICIDES

Resolution 113-00

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Whereas, agricultural workers may be exposed to pesticides in many ways, including mixing or applying pesticides, coming in contact with field residues on crops and soil, contacting pesticides applied in nearby fields drifting to their location, and drinking contaminated water in their community; and

Whereas, farmworker pesticide illnesses are under-reported because many farmworkers are afraid of incurring medical bills, fear retaliation from employers, or do not recognize their symptoms being related to pesticide exposure, and that many physicians are insufficiently trained in diagnosing pesticide illness and fail to report pesticide related cases to the state; [1] and

Whereas, reported pesticide illnesses and injuries among farmworkers have not declined since 1991, while from 1991 to 1996 the California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) reported 3991 cases of occupational poisoning by agricultural pesticides, an average of 665 cases per year; [2] and

Whereas, several occupational studies of workers in farming show an increased risk for chronic health effects such as certain cancers (including brain tumors, urinary tract cancer, prostate, non-Hodgkins lymphoma, and thyroid cancer), neurological damage, birth defects, spontaneous abortions and developmental problems; [3] and

Whereas, enforcement of farmworker protection laws is weak statewide, with county agricultural commissioners issuing fines for about a tenth of the documented violations, and with such fines generally being very low, with almost half of all fines issued statewide being less than \$151, and with less than 5% exceeding \$1,000 [4]; therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the CMA support efforts to reduce farmworker exposure to pesticides by calling on the State to reduce aerial spraying of pesticides, to take steps to reduce pesticide drift, and to eliminate applications where workers will have high risks of exposure; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the CMA recommend that the Department of Pesticide Regulation require effective posting for all agricultural pesticide applications in culturally appropriate language that is highly visible; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the CMA support strengthening enforcement of existing laws by increasing fine levels for serious violations of farmworker protection laws; and be it further

RESOLVED: That CMA encourage physician awareness of pesticide illness, and its reporting law.

REFERENCES

1. Reeves, Margaret, Schafer K, Hallward K, Katten A. Fields of Poison: California Farmworkers and Pesticides. 1999. San Francisco, CA. p 6.
2. California Department of Pesticide Regulation(DPR). 1999. Pesticide Illness Surveillance Program data 1991-1996, provided by DPR in February 1999. California EPA, Sacramento, CA.
3. Stubbs, H, Harris, J and Spear, R. A Proportionate Mortality Analysis of California Agricultural Workers, 1978-1979. Am. J. Indust. Med. 6:305-320, 1984; Zahm, S, Ward, M, and Blair, A. Pesticides and Cancer. Occup. Med.: State of the Art Review, 12:269-289, 1997.
4. Ibid- Reeves, Margaret, p.27.