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Sent: Tue 4/21/2015 1:43:01 PM
Subject: Sirenusa Response News Clips

Dangerous Pesticides Investigated on the Island (Google enabled translation)

By Maritza Diaz Alcaide

Primera Hora.com

04/21/2015

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Agriculture of Puerto Rico have been investigating since before Easter the misuse here of the pesticide methyl bromide.

Exposure to this dangerous pesticide left in March Steve Esmond of Delaware and his two teenage sons unconscious.

The Esmond family was contaminated with the chemical when vacationing in a luxury resort on the Caribbean island of St John.

In the condo complex had been treated with bromide that had been purchased in Puerto Rico.

Last week, the director of the EPA Region 2, Judith Enck said that in the US there is evidence that methyl bromide has been used "improperly in several places" in Puerto Rico.

At that time she offered no other details, but said they were working with the Puerto Rican authorities to determine if someone has been harmed by the chemical.

The director of the EPA in Puerto Rico, José Font, said he is concerned that there may have been an unnecessary chemical exposure, which is the reason for the investigation.

"Here, historically, there have been a few incidents under investigation, but nothing concrete yet ... No connection at all," explained Font.

The search, led in the first instance by the PR Dept. of Agriculture, seeks to establish how they have used the compound on the island and where.

Methyl bromide, a highly toxic pesticide, is banned in other countries and in the United States implementation is rather restrictive.

In Puerto Rico, the compound is mostly used in the docks, where agricultural products are received.

Its use is banned in enclosed spaces and spraying is supposed to be under supervision, in our case by the PR Dept. of Agriculture, which has been delegated this function.

The use of methyl bromide is recommended in the spring mainly because wooden pallets bring many pests, said Agriculture.

Agriculture and EPA are conducting a detailed audit of all documentation both the distributors and of the companies who apply it.

The Auxiliary Assistant Secretary of Agro Trade Integrity at Agriculture, Carmen Oliver Canabal said they have already intervened with 92% of those companies.

She said that "Up to this moment we have not seen an incident or exposure to the chemical in Puerto Rico".

"We will be evaluating on a case by case basis," she added, without revealing how many companies are subject to the inspection.

Methyl bromide was used in St John on a luxury hotel resort, can you rule out if it has been used in hotels here?

"We've ruled that out here. Over there (Virgin Islands) there are not as many regulations as here, "said Oliver Canabal.

On the number of companies, Font noted that while examining orders of sale, the universe is constantly changing.

After the incident in St John, the Department of Agriculture of Puerto Rico issued an administrative order requiring those who will spray bromide to alert that agency 36 hours in advance.

When applying the product staff of the dept of Agriculture must be present.

Oliver Canabal of Agriculture said yesterday that while they are not obliged to do that, to be present during applications, they are trying to be as strict as possible.

The company that used methyl bromide at the resort in Saint John was Terminix, which is being investigated.

Agriculture confirmed that the company that sold the product detected in the incident is current and licensed in Puerto Rico.

Exposure to methyl bromide causes headache, dizziness and weakness.

The most severe cases of exposure can result in damage to the central nervous system and respiratory system.

Those interested in getting more information about the misuse of bromide can call 787-796-1735.

PHOTO: Methyl bromide is used in docks to prevent pests. (Archive)

Agriculture ruled out that methyl bromide has been used here in a hotel sector as was the case in US Virgin Islands.

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