

YOUR VIEW

Aerial spraying needs new rules

By Tim Palmer, Apr 3, 2017

Across 5.8 million acres of industrial forest land in Oregon, logging companies can spray herbicides and pesticides with little regulation. And they spray far more than their own land and trees. Thousands of homes, plus schools, public water supplies, farms, pets, dairy cows, recreation sites and untold mileage of public roads, trails, and waterways full of fish are within a wind's breath of chemical sprays that sometimes include carcinogens.

The results are what any person informed about the effects of 2,4D, atrazine, and other toxins might expect. In Cedar Valley, near the Rogue River, 40 people were sickened and many went to the hospital suffering from the effects of spraying over their homes in 2013.

Health emergencies have resulted from aerial spraying in 11 Oregon counties. Symptoms included nausea, rashes, diarrhea, headaches, asthma attacks, bloody noses and dead pets. Rockaway Beach's water supply was found polluted after aerial spraying nearby. Recognizing these and other problems affecting fish in our streams, the U.S. Forest Service stopped all spraying two decades ago.

After uproar following the Cedar Valley poisonings, modest rules were reluctantly adopted that increased the state's no-spray buffer requirement from zero, which it had been, to 60 feet around homes and schools — about 30 steps. And for that buffer requirement to have any effectiveness at all, one would have to assume that the wind does not blow in Oregon. Or, for that matter, that the helicopter itself doesn't blow the misted chemicals beyond the zone directly beneath it.

The fact that one industry, whose workers comprise less than 3 percent of the state's labor force, can wreak this kind of damage on the rest of the people, land, and water seems a bit outrageous. Not to mention that the industry's own workers are victimized. Not to mention that the chemicals are unnecessary for good forestry and economic returns, as proven by some timber growers that don't use them.

But now there's a chance to improve our plight. Oregon Senate Bill 892, Advanced Notice for Aerial Timber Sprays and Pesticide Reporting, would take the nominal step of requiring industrial sprayers to notify the public five days ahead of spraying and to notify the Department of Forestry within five days afterwards. A hearing on the bill was held on March 22.

Can anyone argue that Oregonians should not be given the courtesy of knowing when it's

unsafe to be in their own yards?

Can anyone argue that school teachers should be barred from knowing when it's hazardous for children to take recess in their own school playgrounds?

With the new law, the doctors who tried to help victims of Cedar Valley — but couldn't because the perpetrating industry refused to reveal what chemicals had been used — might at least know how to treat their patients (after five days).

Our elected officials should be held accountable, and this measure should be passed.

Port Orford resident Tim Palmer is the award-winning author of 22 books on rivers, conservation, and the environment, including Rivers of Oregon, America's Great National Forests and Field Guide to Oregon Rivers. In 2011, he received the National Conservation Achievement Award for communications by the National Wildlife Federation.

http://theworldlink.com/news/opinion/local/serial-spraying-needs-new-rules/article_0df17152-1aca-5e25-95bd-f9d8ee20cf37.html