

# Residents near Fresno-area farms aren't told when pesticides are sprayed. Some want that changed

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Advocates for people living in rural communities this week organized a

statewide effort to get agriculture commissioners in Fresno and surrounding counties to begin notifying residents before pesticides are sprayed nearby.

Organizers held news conferences in Modesto, Salinas, Shafter and Tulare, and others organized in Fresno, Los Angeles and many more cities to raise concerns over chemicals that can cause respiratory irritation, kidney effects and convulsions, among other illnesses.

Agriculture is big business in the central San Joaquin Valley, and Fresno uses the most [pesticides](#) of any county, according to advocates. Fresno County's agricultural and livestock production of \$7.7 billion for 2019 also topped all others in production.

The fix is a simple one, according to Lupe Martinez, a retired organizer formerly with the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment and the United Farm Workers.

The advocates said they want local ag commissioners to post on their websites each day where the pesticides will be applied. That way, residents can take whatever precautions they can to protect themselves and their children—plus reduce their exposure to chemical sprays.

"This is a very simple demand," Martinez said. "We want the ag commissioners to post on a website the notices of intent to apply pesticides. This requires nothing new or more work from the growers. We also think it means very little work for the ag commissioner."

More than 200 million pounds of pesticides are used in California every year, according to advocates.

Since 2018, pesticides cannot be sprayed within a quarter-mile of a school or day care from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. But, advocates say the new

protections for which they are asking are much less onerous.

Pesticides are known to drift up to a mile from where they are sprayed, according to Miriam Rotkin-Ellman, senior scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Studies have repeatedly shown that communities near [pesticide use](#) have increased cases of cancer, Parkinson's disease, learning disabilities, birth defects and autism, Rotkin-Ellman said. Those studies include routine pesticide sprays, not those using illegal methods or chemicals, she stressed.

"The communities are kept in the dark about the poison sprayed near their homes because the local agricultural agencies keep information about planned spray events secret," she said.

Tulare County Assistant Agriculture Commissioner Christopher Greer said the local county office operates off of state standards, noting most of the more than 70,000 types of pesticides used only require farmers to report their use the following month.

Counties across the state use the same standards, he said.

The most toxic pesticides do require the farmer or other type of user to notify the commissioner at least 24 hours before its use, he said. But, the user has up to four days after the proposed date to use it to make up for any unforeseen delays.

About 3,800 permits to use pesticides are on hand with the Tulare office. Many of them require continued education, licenses and training to ensure the sprays are used properly.

Greer said for the office to be able to report pesticides—as the

advocates are asking for—would take a significant change to state guidelines.

Gov. Gavin Newsom in his May revised budget earmarked \$10 million for the infrastructure toward such a notification system for which [advocates](#) are asking.

Advocates argued that the implementation could take years and that local ag commissioners should implement a system immediately with little effort, according to Nayamin Martinez, executive director of Central California Environmental Justice Network.

"We don't need to wait until 2024 or even later for these statewide programs to be a reality," she said. "Ag commissioners can do something and what they can do is easy."

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