

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **New Safeguards Seek to Protect Farmworkers from Pesticides**

EPA proposes updating Worker Protection Standard for Agricultural Pesticides after more than twenty years of problems

WASHINGTON DC—The EPA today proposed strengthening the Worker Protection Standard, which has not been updated in more than twenty years, to address many agricultural pesticide safety concerns.

The federal Worker Protection Standard, first adopted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992, is notoriously difficult to enforce, and does not require record-keeping to document whether rules have actually been followed. It requires only minimal training on the risks that pesticide exposure can pose to workers' children and families, so many workers don't find out about those hazards until after the worst has happened. Additionally, it was designed with only adult workers in mind, but agriculture is different from most other industries in that it allows children to join labor crews at 12 years old – even at 10 in some crops – and these children are exposed to pesticides on the job.

“Each year pesticide exposure poisons tens of thousands of the men, women and children who harvest our food, yet regulations to protect these vital workers have not been updated to address this growing problem,” said Virginia Ruiz, Director of Occupational and Environmental Health for Farmworker Justice. “These injuries, illnesses, and deaths are preventable, and we urge the EPA to implement stronger protections as soon as possible.”

An estimated 1.1 billion pounds of pesticides are applied to crops annually in the United States. The nation's 2 to 2.4 million farmworkers face the greatest threat from the health impacts of these chemicals. Ten to twenty thousand farmworkers are injured by pesticides on the job every year in the US. Short-term effects of pesticide exposures can include skin and eye injuries, nausea, headaches, respiratory problems, and even death. Long-term exposure on the job can increase the risk of serious chronic health problems such as cancer, birth defects, neurological impairments and Parkinson's disease for farmworkers, their families, and their children.

“We appreciate the EPA moving forward on this very important issue of stronger worker protections regarding toxic pesticides. We will review the proposed changes to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing pesticide poisoning of the people who harvest our food and their family members,” said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice. “We, and other farmworker advocacy groups, will comment on the proposal and mobilize the public to show broad public support for stronger protections.”

Last week 52 members of Congress, led by Rep. Raúl Grijalva of Arizona and Linda Sanchez of California, urged EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy in a [letter](#) to release the proposed rule, stating that the current agricultural worker protection standard is "limited" and "insufficient" to protect workers from the hazards of handling pesticides. The same week, California-based Pesticide Action Network submitted a [petition](#) to McCarthy to strengthen the Worker Protection Standard, signed by more than 18,000 citizens.

The proposed revisions to the Worker Protection Standard can be viewed on the [EPA's website](#). The revisions will also be posted in the Federal Register in March, at which time the EPA will begin accepting comments from the public for 90 days.

To learn more about the harm caused by pesticide exposure, click [here](#) to read Farmworker Justice's report *Exposed and Ignored: How Pesticides are Endangering Our Nation's Farmworkers*.

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*Farmworker Justice is a nonprofit litigation, advocacy and education organization that seeks to empower migrant and seasonal farmworkers to improve wages, working conditions, immigration policy, health, occupational safety and access to justice.*