



For Immediate Release:
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EPA Bans Sale of AZM

AZM exposure has poisoned farmworkers and their families

Washington, D.C. – Today the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reconfirmed that all sales of the pesticide azinphos-methyl (AZM) will be banned after September 30, 2012. AZM is a highly neurotoxic insecticide that attacks the human brain and nervous system. However, while AZM can no longer be sold or distributed, stocks purchased prior to that time can be used up until September 30, 2013 due to growers having a backlog of the pesticide due to unusual weather patterns, the EPA said.

In 2004, farmworkers and environmental groups represented by Earthjustice and Farmworker Justice sued the EPA for allowing the continued use of AZM, despite numerous poisonings every year of workers and people who live near the fields. To settle the lawsuit, the EPA agreed to consider alternatives to AZM and the toll it takes on people and to reconsider allowing its continued use. In November 2006, EPA decided that the harm to workers and families is so great that all uses of AZM must be phased out by September 30, 2012, and it required reduced usage and additional protections for workers during the phase-out period.

EPA gave industry and growers an opportunity to make the case for continuing AZM uses. It reviewed new information and arguments made, but today confirmed that the harm to people is still too great to allow this nerve poison to be used on our crops. The last uses of AZM to be eliminated are on apples, cherries, pears, blueberries, and parsley. The highest uses occur in Washington, Oregon, California, Michigan, and New York.

Earthjustice Vice President Patti Goldman, who represented the farmworkers in court, applauded the end of the use of AZM: “This deadly chemical is far too harmful to be used on our food. It has taken us going to court to force the EPA to protect the American people from this deadly chemical. AZM will be off the market in a month and out of the air and our food in one year. It has taken too long but we will finally see the end of this nasty pesticide.”

Virginia Ruiz with Farmworker Justice said: “Unfortunately AZM can still be used for one more year, so farmworkers and their families will still be subject to the harmful effects of this pesticide. We’re deeply disappointed that growers can still purchase this poison for another month and then use it for another season.”