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Study shows scientists were unable to find a link between aerial spraying and illness complaints

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SACRAMENTO – A study released by state health officials shows that there was no conclusive link between the Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) spraying and the reported illnesses last fall in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties.

Doctors and scientists from the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the state Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) examined the illness complaints that followed aerial spraying of a pheromone product in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties last year and described their findings in today's report.

“We examined all of the complaints and it was not possible to link the reported symptoms to the aerial spraying,” said OEHHA Director Dr. Joan Denton.

As the LBAM program continues, the state will monitor the safety of any future spraying. The study recommends that health officials should improve outreach programs and enhance systems for collecting and analyzing any reports of health effects following spray applications.

“We want to assure the public that we are responding to their safety concerns,” Denton said. “Doctors will know how to recognize and treat symptoms if they occur, and we will collect complete information on any health effects that citizens report.”

The study considered all complaints the state has received, both formal and informal, but most did not contain enough information to determine the cause of the symptoms reported. In addition, most of the symptoms reported were relatively mild or common among the general public. The most commonly reported symptoms were eye, skin or respiratory irritation that could be consistent with a variety of possible causes, such as allergies, pollen or the common cold. As a result, the agencies concluded in the report that they cannot conclusively determine whether or not there is a direct link between the reported symptoms and the aerial spraying.

OEHHA and DPR had earlier examined the pheromone product that was sprayed and concluded that the amount that reached the ground was extremely low – less than one ounce of pheromones and other chemical ingredients was deposited on the ground per acre within the aerial-application areas.

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The three state agencies that prepared today's report already are working to implement recommendations for improved public outreach, surveillance and reporting of symptoms related to future eradication efforts. They are currently working to establish a dedicated toll-free telephone number for medical providers and the public to report any adverse health effects believed to be related to the aerial pheromone application. Calls will be answered by trained staff who will record information in standardized formats and send it to OEHHA and DPR.

OEHHA and CDPH will also do outreach with local health departments, physician groups and county environmental health departments. The outreach program will provide doctors with information on symptoms to look for and questions to ask people who believe they have symptoms associated with spraying. Doctors will receive information on how to file Pesticide Illness Reports that can be used to better document, assess and respond to potential problems.

It has been widely reported that 643 people complained of symptoms they believe were caused by the spraying in Monterey and Santa Cruz last year. However, the study found that many of those were duplicates, and most never sought medical attention or called CDFA's hotline. When the duplicates were eliminated, the study found 487 confirmed symptom reports.

A total of 79 people consulted with doctors about symptoms following the spraying, but only 45 Pesticide Illness Reports were filed. Doctors are required to file Pesticide Illness Reports to the state every time they see symptoms that may be related to pesticide applications.

Many of the complaints were sent only to private parties in response to an ad on craigslist and solicitations on other websites that later sent them to health officials.

The complete report is available on OEHHA's website at <http://www.oehha.ca.gov>. Extensive information on the LBAM eradication program is available at http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/phpps/PDEP/lbam/lbam_main.html.