

APVMA – Atrazine review progresses

Press Release from the APVMA, regarding its current Existing Chemical Review on the active Atrazine

The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) plans to finalise its review of the herbicide atrazine and undertake regulatory action in addition to measures already implemented.

The APVMA considered concerns related to toxicological, occupational exposure and environmental issues.

Following publication of a report in 1997, the APVMA took regulatory action prior to 2000 to mitigate many of the concerns identified at the commencement of the review, including removal of all approved domestic uses.

A further report was published in 2004 that proposed additional label instructions intended to reduce the likelihood of atrazine finding its way into waterways. Since then, the APVMA has given consideration to public feedback, including concerns that the proposed approach does not go far enough to reduce risks.

On 22 June the APVMA met with community representatives to allow them the opportunity to inform the regulator of ongoing and emerging concerns with the use of atrazine in Australia. A range of drinking water and environmental experts, as well as Australian regulators and health professionals attended the forum.

After carefully considering the information presented and taking advice from the Office of Chemical Safety (OCS) in the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) and the Department of the Environment and Water Resources (DEW), the APVMA has concluded that at the present time there is no scientific consensus on the issues raised by community representatives.

In particular, community representatives expressed concerns that atrazine at very low levels could affect hormonal development in male frogs and that this raised concerns for human health, if atrazine were to make its way into drinking water.

However, the APVMA has not seen any direct evidence that atrazine is a risk to human health. Indeed, extensive studies in laboratory test animals show that there are no effects on health or reproduction in mammals maintained on drinking water containing atrazine and related compounds at these low levels. Even at concentrations up to 100 times the levels that can sometimes be found in groundwater in the United States, laboratory test results indicate there were no toxic effects on the animals, their progeny or their ability to reproduce.

Furthermore, frog populations in the United States do not appear to be affected from season to season by exposure to atrazine, indicating that low level exposure in the environment is not likely to be having any long-term effects on amphibians.

With the forum now over, the APVMA now proposes to complete the current review and implement revised label instructions, in order to reduce the likelihood of atrazine finding its way into waterways.

The APVMA is prepared to reopen the review if further studies raise significant environmental or human health concerns. Triggers for a further review would include new data sufficient to change the current regulatory findings for atrazine or significant overseas regulatory action that is based on sound science.

More information on the Atrazine Review on the APVMA website.
