

DPR works with Farm Bureau for container recycling

By Mary-Ann Warmerdam

It may not be the kind of environmental issue that makes headlines, but anyone who knows farming in California understands the problem of empty pesticide containers. Chances are good that if you own a farm, there's a spot somewhere on your property for a pile of empty drums, because proper disposal can be such a hassle.

Many of these containers are made of high-density polyethylene (HDPE). After rinsing, they could be recycled into products such as fencing, pallets and marine pilings. In fact, thanks to a group of manufacturers and sellers, a voluntary program has processed more than 80 million pounds of plastic pesticide containers in the last decade. The California Department of Pesticide Regulation and other agencies applaud their efforts.

But some other members of industry never joined the voluntary program. We all know what happens when only a few people support a program that benefits many. Now the program can't keep up with demand and is stretched to the breaking point. There are only a limited number of recyclers in California who are certified to take containers, and the majority of California growers do not have ready access to a recycler.

This is one of those cases where a formal, government-sanctioned recycling initiative is the only feasible alternative. And it makes sense for government to get involved when growers want to do the right thing for the environment, but the market can't seem to serve them fairly and effectively.

For several years, DPR has urged U.S. EPA to require a national pesticide container-recycling program. I'm glad to report that an EPA initiative seems to be moving forward, but we can't be sure when it will begin. In the meantime, DPR is sponsoring state legislation to ensure that container recycling will become a reality in California.

Senate Bill 1723, carried by Senator Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria, would require that those who sell agricultural



and commercial pesticides in our state either participate in a recycling program or create their own program. Sellers would pay the costs, based on mandatory recordkeeping, and DPR would implement regulations to assure compliance.

SB 1723 has passed out of the Senate without any official industry opposition. It goes to the Assembly Agriculture Committee this week, and is also scheduled for referral to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee.

Among other parties, we're working closely with the California Farm Bureau to ensure that our recycling effort will be consistent with whatever program emerges at U.S. EPA. I'm very hopeful that with the Farm Bureau's assistance, we can get this bill to the governor's desk for his signature this year.

This is one of those cases where individual growers can have an impact. Please contact your legislators and urge their support for this much needed bill.

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