

Alaska Dispatch

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Polar bears and pesticides - new lawsuit

By Jill Burke

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A lawsuit filed Thursday against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency alleges the agency has failed in its obligation to protect the polar bear, listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in Spring 2008, from toxic contamination.

Pesticides, regulated in the United States by the EPA, make it to the arctic through wind, water and the food chain, and are "biomagnified with each step higher in the food web, reaching their greatest concentration in polar bears," argues the Center for Biological Diversity, which filed the suit claiming the EPA is required to evaluate the effect of approved pesticides on species listed under the ESA.

Polar bears face suppressed immune function, endocrine disruption, shrinkage of reproductive organs, hermaphroditism, and increased cub mortality as a result of exposure to pesticides and related contaminants, with arctic hunters also being at risk, according to a press release from the center.