

Environmental group sues EPA on polar bear pesticides Suit links pesticides to damaging bioaccumulation in Arctic

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An environmental group announced today that it is suing the Environmental Protection Agency for "failing to consider" the affect of pesticides on polar bears and their Arctic habitat.

The Center for Biological Diversity filed the suit in Seattle on Thursday, Dec. 3.

"The pesticide crisis is a silent killer that threatens not only polar bears but the entire Arctic ecosystem," said staff attorney Rebecca Noblin in a statement.

The suit alleges that EPA-approved pesticides are transported via wind and water to the Arctic, where they accumulate. The pesticides become biomagnified, with the highest concentrations in top-of-the-food-chain predators like polar bears.

Such pesticides have been linked to poor immune function, endocrine disruption and other defects in polar bears. Because the animals are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the EPA has a legal obligation to protect the animals from the impacts of pesticides, the lawsuit says.

Pesticides don't just affect the health of animals, says Pamela Miller of the Anchorage-based Alaska Community Action on Toxics organization.

People who live and eat traditional foods in the Arctic have some of the highest rates of toxic exposure, says Miller, and health problems to go along with.

Miller says that the lawsuit, the first legal challenge that links pesticides with toxic bioaccumulation in the Arctic, is an important step toward rectifying what she calls a serious environmental injustice.

"It's an environmental injustice when people have to be concerned about the health and safety of traditional foods they eat."

Marine mammals, like ring seals, that are part of traditional indigenous diets in the North have some of the highest accumulations of chemicals in their fat.

On the same day that the Center for Biological Diversity filed suit against the EPA, Miller's organization and 42 other groups sent a letter to EPA administrators asking them to ban the insecticide endosulfan, which they say is persistent, toxic and builds up in the bodies of humans.

"It's important for the EPA to recognize the vulnerability of the Arctic when they make decisions about pesticides," Miller said.

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