

## 20. **PESTICIDES:** Citing climate threat, groups urge EPA to reject bid for fumigant tests (07/14/2009)

Sara Goodman, E&E reporter

Environmental groups are urging U.S. EPA to deny Dow AgroSciences' request to allow tests of a termite-fighting insecticide on farmland because the chemical is a potent greenhouse gas.

The company is proposing farm tests of sulfuryl fluoride, which came into widespread use for termite treatments on buildings after the 1987 Montreal Protocol phased out methyl bromide for its depletion of the ozone layer.

Several recent studies have shown sulfuryl fluoride to be a greenhouse gas -- 4,800 times more potent as a warming agent than carbon dioxide -- that lingers in the atmosphere for about 36 years, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ([ClimateWire](#), March 11).

Dow is seeking an EPA permit to test the chemical on farms in California, Florida, Georgia and Texas. The company says the fumigant is the only effective alternative to methyl bromide.

But environmental groups argue that the climate impacts of releasing sulfuryl fluoride into the air far outweigh any possible benefit, saying allowing the permit would be "unjustifiable."

"This testing could lead to widespread use of this as a pesticide instead of just an indoor fumigant," said Justin Augustine with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that filed the letter. "The fact that this is not just toxic, it's a double whammy being a major greenhouse gas also."

Brian Hill, a staff scientist at the Pesticide Action Network, which also signed the letter, also expressed concern about the proposal. "It's a pre-plant fumigation, so you're going for nematodes, fungi and bacteria, which are traditionally stuff dealt with by doing crop rotation," Hill said. "It really does seem like a destructive way to farm."

Dow spokesman Tim Maniscalco called the chemical a "vital replacement" for methyl bromide. Additionally, Maniscalco said in an e-mail, research has been going on for decades into alternatives to sulfuryl fluoride, and none have been found.

Furthermore, he said there remains uncertainty about sulfuryl fluoride's global warming impact and that the company supports further research into that area. "[C]ompared to the magnitude of emissions from fossil fuel use, deforestation and other sources, the total amount of sulfuryl fluoride released to the atmosphere from authorized treatments is relatively small," he said.

Sulfuryl fluoride was last registered by EPA in 1993 to treat structures for termites. At that point, the product had not been evaluated for its impact on the environment, Hill said, and the global warming aspect was unknown.

EPA last month opened a registration review for sulfuryl fluoride to consider the latest findings on the chemical, EPA spokesman Dale Kemery said. The agency plans to conduct a human health risk assessment and an ecological risk assessment, including an examination of possible harm to endangered species, as a part of the review. The public has until the end of August to comment.

Kemery said the agency did not have an immediate comment on the letter regarding Dow's experimental test permit.

[Click here](#) to read the letter.

[Click here](#) to read Dow's permit request.

[Click here](#) to read EPA's registration notification.



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