



Dow Chemical urges Trump administration to ignore pesticide findings

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Dow Chemical is pushing a Trump administration that's open to scrapping regulations to ignore the findings of federal scientists who point to a family of widely used pesticides as harmful to about 1,800 critically threatened or endangered species.

Lawyers representing Dow, whose CEO is a close adviser to President Donald Trump, and two other manufacturers of organophosphates sent letters last week to the heads of three of Trump's Cabinet agencies. The companies asked them "to set aside" the results of government studies the companies contend are fundamentally flawed.

Dow Chemical wrote a \$1 million check to help underwrite Trump's inaugural festivities, and its chairman and CEO, Andrew Liveris, heads a White House manufacturing working group.

The industry's request comes after EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announced last month he was reversing an Obama-era effort to bar the use of Dow's chlorpyrifos pesticide on food after recent peer-reviewed studies found that even tiny levels of exposure could hinder the development of children's brains.

In his prior job as Oklahoma's attorney general, Pruitt often aligned himself in legal disputes with the interests of executives and corporations who supported his state campaigns. He filed more than a dozen lawsuits seeking to overturn some of the same regulations he is now charged with enforcing.

Pruitt declined to answer questions from reporters Wednesday as he toured a polluted Superfund site in Indiana. Agency spokesman J.P. Freire later told AP that Pruitt won't "pre-judge" any potential rule-making decisions as "we are trying to restore regulatory sanity to EPA's work."

The letters to Cabinet heads, dated April 13, were obtained by The Associated Press. As with the recent human studies of chlorpyrifos, Dow hired its own scientists who produced a lengthy rebuttal to the government studies.

Over the past four years, federal scientists have compiled an official record running more than 10,000 pages indicating the three pesticides under review — chlorpyrifos, diazinon and malathion — pose a risk to nearly every endangered species they studied. Regulators at the three federal agencies, which share responsibilities for enforcing the Endangered Species Act, are close to issuing findings expected to result in new limits on how and where the highly toxic pesticides can be used.

Strawberries and these other foods have the most pesticides

The office of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, who oversees the Natural Marine Fisheries Service, did not respond to emailed questions. A spokeswoman for Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who oversees the Fish and Wildlife Service, referred questions back to EPA.

The EPA's recent biological evaluation of chlorpyrifos found the pesticide is "likely to adversely affect" 1,778 of the 1,835 animals and plants assessed as part of its study, including critically endangered or threatened species of frogs, fish, birds and mammals. Similar results were shown for malathion and diazinon.

In a statement, the Dow subsidiary that sells chlorpyrifos said its lawyers asked for the EPA's biological assessment to be withdrawn because its "scientific basis was not reliable."

"Dow AgroSciences is committed to the production and marketing of products that will help American farmers feed the world, and do so with full respect for human health and the environment, including endangered and threatened species," the statement said. "These letters, and the detailed scientific analyses that support them, demonstrate that commitment."

FMC Corp., which sells malathion, said withdrawal of the EPA studies would allow the necessary time for the "best available" scientific data to be compiled.

Environmental advocates said Wednesday that criticism of the government's scientists was unfounded.

The methods used to conduct EPA's biological evaluations were developed by the National Academy of Sciences.

Brett Hartl, government affairs director for the Center for Biological Diversity, said Dow's experts were trying to hold EPA scientists to an unrealistic standard of data collection.

"You can't just take an endangered fish out of the wild, take it to the lab and then expose it to enough pesticides until it dies to get that sort of data," Hartl said. "It's wrong morally, and it's illegal."

Organophosphorus gas was originally developed as a chemical weapon by Nazi Germany. Dow has been selling Chlorpyrifos for spraying on citrus fruits, apples, cherries and other crops since the 1960s. It is among the most widely used agricultural pesticides in the United States, with Dow selling about 5 million pounds domestically each year.

As a result, traces of the chemical are commonly found in sources of drinking water. A 2012 study at the University of California, Berkeley found that 87 percent of umbilical-cord blood samples tested from newborn babies contained detectable levels of chlorpyrifos.

Dow, which spent more than \$13.6 million on lobbying in 2016, has long wielded substantial political power in the nation's capital. When Trump signed an executive order in February mandating the creation of task forces at federal agencies to roll back government regulations, he gave the pen as a souvenir to Dow's chief executive and thanked Liveris.

Rachelle Schikorra, the director of public affairs for Dow Chemical, said any suggestion that the company's \$1 million donation to Trump's inaugural committee was intended to help influence regulatory decisions is "completely off the mark."

"Dow maintains and is committed to the highest standard of ethical conduct in all such activity," Schikorra said.