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## Environmentalists sue to force Barton Springs study

Associated Press

AUSTIN - A lawsuit by Central Texas environmentalists and others seeks to force the federal government to determine whether six pesticides detected in a popular swimming hole are harming endangered salamanders.

The Save Our Springs Alliance sued the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Monday in Washington, contending that it has repeatedly failed to consider the extent to which common pesticides may be harming endangered species.

The Center for Biological Diversity, a Tucson, Ariz.-based group, joined in the lawsuit. It urges a federal court to force the EPA to assess the risks and determine appropriate safeguards in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The USFWS has repeatedly cautioned the EPA about potential risks that pesticides pose to Barton Springs salamanders, particularly the herbicide atrazine, but agency officials have ignored those warnings, SOS Alliance Deputy Director Brad Rockwell said.

President "Bush's EPA is looking

out for toxic polluters rather than the health of Texans and their natural heritage," Daniel Patterson, a scientist with the center, told the Austin American-Statesman in today's editions. "As goes the salamander, so goes human health."

Dave Bary, an EPA spokesman at the agency's regional headquarters in Dallas, said its staff had not heard about the lawsuit and could not comment without reviewing the complaint.

The agency is required by the Endangered Species Act to ensure that pesticides don't jeopardize the existence of endangered species. The EPA also is responsible for authorizing pesticide use nationwide.

Tests of water at Barton Springs by the U.S. Geological Survey in 2000 detected a variety of water-soluble pesticides at levels exceeding those shown to harm amphibians in some cases. A later test at Upper Barton Springs, above the pool, detected atrazine exceeding the federal drinking water limit.

An injunction was sought by environmentalists that would restrict pesticide use in the Barton Springs wa-

tershed that could harm the salamanders until the EPA completes a full assessment. Possibilities include limits on the use of certain pesticides near streams and other areas where water enters the aquifer that feeds the springs, said Brian Litmans, a lawyer representing the environmental groups.

Other pesticides cited in the lawsuit are diazinon, simazine, carbaryl, prometon and metolachlor.

Barton Springs Pool reopened last year after it was closed for months by the city. State and federal health officials said that toxic substances found in tests of water and sediment didn't pose a health risk to swimmers.