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Environmental groups petition EPA to retract fluoride pesticide tolerances on food

Two national environmental organizations, Environmental Working Group and Beyond Pesticides, joined today with the Fluoride Action Network in challenging the safety of new food tolerances issued by the EPA for the fluoride based pesticide, sulfuryl fluoride. This action marks growing concern among mainstream scientists and environmental organizations that total exposure to fluoride, from water, food, and dental uses like toothpaste and rinses, is not safe for vulnerable populations, particularly young children.

The challenge was directed at the maximum legal limits for the fluoride-based pesticide in foods, which have been set at levels that dwarf the amount allowed in tap water. In just one case, the EPA is allowing 900 parts per million of fluoride in dried eggs, as opposed to the maximum 4 ppm allowed in tap water. One third of the nation's eggs are sold and consumed in dried, reconstituted form.

The groups noted that 900 ppm set for dried eggs is extremely close to that used in toothpaste (1,000 ppm), a level that is considered toxic if consumed in greater than pea sized portions. "How can the EPA consider 900 ppm in eggs safe, while the Food and Drug Administration directs parents to call poison control centers if their children consume more than a pea sized portion of toothpaste with fluoride at 1,000 ppm?" asked Paul Connett, PhD, Executive Director of FAN. "Unlike toothpaste, eggs are meant to be eaten, not spit out."

The precise FDA required label on toothpastes with fluoride levels of 1000 ppm is:

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"WARNING: Do not swallow. Use only a pea-sized amount for children under six... If you accidentally swallow more than used for brushing, seek professional help or contact a poison control center immediately."

The EPA has set fluoride tolerances for over 200 foodstuffs ranging from 5 ppm in cheese all the way up to 900 ppm in powdered eggs. The groups warn that at the maximum level of fluoride a serving of scrambled eggs made with as few as two egg equivalents could make a child vomit and a four egg omelet could have the same effect on an adult.

The tolerances were requested by Dow AgroSciences, which is expanding its use of the pesticide sulfuryl fluoride (trade named ProFume) to fumigate food processing facilities and storage areas. Dow has never conducted crucial safety tests on fluoride residues yet scientific studies point to serious health risks from ingesting even small amounts. A wealth of independent, peer reviewed studies have found adverse effects on children's developing brains, the male reproductive system, kidneys, and bones.

According to Fluoride Action Network (FAN) researcher Chris Neurath, "It isn't just powdered eggs that will have dangerous levels of fluoride allowed. All processed foods will be allowed 70 ppm fluoride residues. That includes everything from breakfast cereal to hamburger helper to cake mix. Wheat flour is allowed up to 125 ppm. For comparison, the maximum level of fluoride allowed in drinking water is 4 ppm and the natural level of fluoride in mothers' milk is approximately 0.008 ppm. The EPA argues that most fumigated foods won't contain the highest allowed levels so there is no need to worry. Yet the USDA's surveillance program for pesticide residues on foods routinely finds samples bought at stores that exceed the EPA tolerances. The potential for a significant number of acute poisoning cases every year is very real."

"We are very concerned that total fluoride exposure is not safe for children," said Richard Wiles, Senior Vice-President of Environmental Working Group (EWG). "EPA is relying on outdated science to support this increase in fluoride exposure, and in our view has not discharged its legal duty to thoroughly consider the effects of fluoride on infants and children, from all routes of exposure, based on a thorough review of the most recent peer-reviewed science."

Jay Feldman of Beyond Pesticides adds, "This is yet another example of the EPA pesticide division protecting the bottom line of Dow AgroSciences rather than the health of the American public."

According to Connett, "It is ironic that, while 11 EPA Unions, representing over 7000 professionals, are calling for a moratorium on water fluoridation because of its likely role in causing osteosarcoma in young males, the EPA's pesticide division has approved the highest fluoride tolerances in US history. With the Centers for Disease Control admitting that 1 in 3 American children have dental fluorosis [the telltale sign of overexposure to fluoride during early childhood] now is not the time to be adding more fluoride to the nation's food supply."

The appeal by FAN, EWG, & Beyond Pesticides can be accessed at:

<http://www.fluorideaction.org/pesticides/epa-sf/submission.html>

The EPA Unions resolution can be found here:

<http://www.fluorideaction.net/epa-unions1.pdf>

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