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PESTICIDE BOARD DROPS AERIAL SPRAY PROPOSAL

RALEIGH –Community activists today cheered the NC Pesticide Board’s decision not to proceed with a controversial proposal that would have allowed aerial pesticide applicators in the state to deposit up to 6 parts per million (ppm) of unwanted pesticide on neighboring “sensitive areas” including homes, schools, churches and businesses. Board members cited public outcry as the main reason behind their decision, stating that they never intended to pass a rule that would have harmed public health.

The Pesticide Board received over 2,000 comments from North Carolinians last year, most of them opposed to the rule change. Many requested improvements to the current regulatory system, including notification of neighbors before aerial spraying begins nearby. Citizen groups attending today’s Pesticide Board meeting called on Board members to respond to those requests.

"This was a bad idea based on bad science and it almost became law", stated Delma Blinson, Chair of the Chocowinity Middle School PTO's Pesticide Committee, a group formed after Chocowinity Middle School in Beaufort County was subject to drift from a nearby crop-duster in 2001 as children arrived at school. "The inadequacies in the regulatory system just amazed all of us. The Pesticide Board needs to ask: 'How did this happen and what is needed to keep it from happening again?' It should never happen again."

“Aerial spraying is hurting people all over rural North Carolina,” said Judilyn Knight, who has been ill since she was sprayed in 2002 and 2003 while driving near cotton fields in Hoke County. “The Pesticide Board’s job is supposed to be protecting people from pesticides. Today’s decision was a good first step, but they can do more.”

Farmworker advocates, environmentalists, health care practitioners, educators, organic farmers and others have expressed grave concerns about the high potential for toxic drift when pesticides are sprayed from the air. Recently the US EPA wrote to the Pesticide Board expressing their concern with the proposal’s scientific basis and enforceability. Neighbors of aerial spray applications currently receive no notice before spraying begins, and are not informed about precautions to take, even when they do report incidents to the state. The Agricultural Resources Center & Pesticide Education Project, a pesticide reform group, recently opened a toll-free hotline for NC victims of pesticide drift: 1-877-NO DRIFT.

“The Pesticide Board has acted responsibly by stopping this proposal in its tracks,” stated Fawn Pattison, ARC/PESTed’s director. “With this episode behind them, they can now focus on their serious charge to protect human health and the environment from toxic pesticides.”

Minutes from the Pesticide Board meeting are available from the NC Pesticide Section, (919) 733-3556. For more information on aerial spraying and pesticide drift in North Carolina, visit www.PESTed.org.