

Summer 2016

County Farm Bureau Issue Backgrounder
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Atrazine

Background

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) regulates the use of herbicides and pesticides in Wisconsin. In administrative rule ATCP 30 (Pesticide Product Restrictions), there are provisions and prohibitions on the use of atrazine products. Specifically, ATCP 30 regulates the amount of atrazine that can be used per acre, the timing of application and requires record keeping of this information.

Furthermore, ATCP 30 contains a process to establish atrazine prohibition areas if atrazine is found in the groundwater. If a groundwater sample is found to contain atrazine and/or its metabolites exceed the preventative action limit (PAL) of three parts per billion, DATCP is directed to conduct a follow-up investigation. Another groundwater sample is taken and tested to verify the results. In addition, an investigator from DATCP will review the farming practices in the area, soil types and groundwater flow.

If the investigator determines that the continued use of atrazine will probably contribute to additional groundwater contamination, DATCP will propose to establish a new atrazine prohibition area or expand an existing prohibition area. This is done by formal administrative rulemaking to update ATCP 30 to contain the new prohibition area. Since 1990, more than 100 prohibition areas have been created that encompass more than 1.2 million acres.

ATCP 30 also contains a process to repeal prohibition areas if the following conditions are met.

1. Tests on three consecutive groundwater samples taken at intervals of at least six months show that the concentration of atrazine and its metabolites is below 50 percent of the enforcement standard.
2. If there are other wells in the area, they are to be tested to verify that the concentration of atrazine and its metabolites also do not exceed 50 percent of the enforcement standard.
3. DATCP determines, based on credible scientific evidence, that the renewed use of atrazine products in the prohibition area is not likely to cause a renewed violation of the enforcement standard. If these three conditions are met, DATCP can proceed with formal administrative rulemaking to update ATCP 30 to remove the prohibition area. To date, no prohibition area has been repealed.

Discussion

There is on-going discussion by farmers about trying to repeal some of the prohibition areas for a variety of reasons. Atrazine's current label application rates are lower than before. Weed resistance in some prohibition areas could be addressed with limited atrazine use. Atrazine use may help reduce soil erosion when combined with conservation tillage practices.

Current WFBF Policy

We oppose a complete ban on the use of any agricultural chemical or drug unless it can be demonstrated positively by prolonged and responsible research that use of a product represents a clear and present danger to health or that its use would seriously jeopardize the environment.

Wisconsin pesticide and herbicide registrations and regulations should not be more restrictive than federal standards.

We support that any new atrazine prohibition area in the state come out of a recommendation of the state Agrichemical Technical Advisory Council before DATCP can proceed in the rule making process to add these new areas.

Questions to Consider

1. Does WFBF policy adequately address atrazine issues?
2. Should WFBF policy contain provisions about repealing atrazine prohibition areas?
3. Other suggestions?