

Media release: Regulator clears atrazine for continued use

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Following a detailed investigation, the national regulator of pesticides and veterinary medicines, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), has cleared the herbicide, atrazine, of links to cancer and other health concerns.

According to APVMA Principal Scientist, Dr David Loschke, the review of atrazine has concluded that the chemical is not carcinogenic nor is it likely to be an endocrine disruptor, based on the weight of evidence.

‘This has been a complex review, initially undertaken because of potential health concerns with atrazine and its potential to contaminate ground and surface water,’ Dr Loschke said.

‘We released an interim report in 1997, which concluded that there were no major toxicological concerns relating to the use of atrazine. However, use in the home garden was no longer allowed and new conditions for use of the chemical were implemented to reduce worker exposure and reduce drift and runoff into water bodies,’ he said.

‘As well, the APVMA required additional environmental and residue data to address remaining questions related to the potential risk its use poses to the environment and the validity of a number of maximum residue limits (MRLs).’

‘When the review of this data was near completion a new overseas study which claimed to link atrazine use to developmental and reproductive problems in frogs raised new concerns about the potential of the chemical to cause endocrine disruption,’ he said.

‘The review was not finalised at that time to allow the new concerns to be investigated.’

‘After this long process, our study of all the relevant data has cleared the widely used herbicide of links to health problems when used according to label directions and has also found that it can be used without undue risk to the environment when managed appropriately. The original changes to the use conditions, designed to add an extra margin of safety for health and the environment, have been confirmed as appropriate,’ Dr Loschke said.

Public comment is invited on the draft review report, to be submitted to the APVMA by 25 February 2005.

Atrazine is a selective systemic herbicide used Australia-wide for the control of grass and broadleaf weeds. It is mainly absorbed through the roots of plants and then transported to the actively growing tips and leaves, although some foliar absorption occurs. Atrazine acts on plants by inhibiting photosynthesis.

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