

Uncertainty swirls around pesticide OK'd for state strawberries

By Kurtis Alexander, Santa Cruz Sentinel

State regulators plan to give strawberry growers the OK to use methyl iodide this month.

The pesticide, which kills bugs, weeds and disease that are particularly threatening to berries, is touted as a better alternative to methyl bromide, which is being phased out because of harm it's done to the ozone layer. But a last-ditch campaign is under way to halt approval of methyl iodide, citing problems with the alternate choice.

"We've heard that methyl iodide is a carcinogen. That's not disputed... So why are we even having this conversation?" said state Assemblyman Bill Monning, D-Carmel.

Monning was among a coalition of environmentalists, researchers and organic farmers that gathered Monday at Jacobs Farm in Santa Cruz County – and at six other sites statewide – protesting the impending use of methyl iodide and asking the governor or governor-elect to block it. The Legislature, Monning said, was not in a position to intervene now and future legislative efforts would be slow and uncertain.

"We want to stop it before it's in the fields," he said.

Critics of methyl iodide cite not only the proven cancer-causing qualities of the pesticide but the potential for methyl iodide to leach out of the field and contaminate water supplies.

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