

Environmental groups want stricter pesticide rules in California

By Robert Rodriguez, Fresno Bee

A group of environmentalists is calling for tighter government restrictions on pesticide use, saying current regulations are creating a health risk among children.

The Oakland-based Pesticide Action Network released a report Tuesday blaming pesticide use for a rising number of health problems among children, including developmental disabilities, autism and attention deficit disorder.

The report titled, "A Generation in Jeopardy: How pesticides are undermining our children's health and intelligence" compiled existing academic and government research to make its claims.

The report was released in several cities across the country, including Fresno.

"The growing body of research tells us that pesticides, in combination with other environmental and behavioral factors, are creating a looming epidemic of diseases and disorders," said Sarah Sharpe, environmental health director of Fresno Metro Ministry.

Sharpe said the report urges federal regulators to create tougher policies that would make it easier to pull existing pesticides off the market when scientific studies suggest they may harm children.

The report also calls for more support for farmers to help them transition away from using pesticides and to create a national goal for reducing pesticide use.

But state officials say some of what the environmental groups are asking for already is being done.

Lea Brooks, spokeswoman for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, said the agency has spent more than \$6 million since the 1990s to support 60 projects and 130 different organizations to reduce pesticides.

The department is also the only one in the nation that routinely does environmental monitoring of soil, water and air. It also tracks pesticide residue in fresh produce.

“And we use this information to determine if any further regulatory measures are necessary,” Brooks said. “Our job is to enforce the regulations on pesticide use to assure proper and safe use of pesticides.”

Brooks said the department’s scientists are reviewing the report’s findings.