

Spray

Continued from Page A1

out their consent.

"We should not be forced to breathe anything but air," said Katherine Herndon, a Santa Cruz resident and former school nurse for 20 years.

While a lawsuit has been filed by an environmental group in Monterey County to stop a second aerial spraying on the Monterey Peninsula set to start Tuesday, there's already talk about some Santa Cruz County parents pulling their children out of schools. The parents want to send a message to the state that "fewer students means fewer dollars," said Suzanne Dowling, a Soquel resident.

As much as Kawamura tried to quell residents' fears by saying the product, CheckMate LBAM-F, has been used in Australia for 10 years without reports of harmful consequences, the crowd countered with concern that the pesticide has never been sprayed in an urban setting.

More unsettling, they said, is that the manufacturer, the Bend, Ore.-based Suterra Inc., refuses to release the ingredients of its product on the basis that it's a trade secret.

CheckMate LBAM-F, a pesticide, was registered by the EPA in 1997 as a toxic III substance. The agency says it's generally safe when diluted and applied as prescribed by the company. In greater concentrations testing on lab animals found it caused irritation to the skin and eyes and is harmful when swallowed.

The product is not designed to kill the light brown apple moth, but to act as a pheromone and confuse the male moths to the point where they cannot find a female to reproduce with, officials said. They've added that pesticides, overall, have come a long way over time and that this one in particular is about as naturally occurring as it gets.

"We feel, and are absolutely convinced, that the application does not pose a risk," said Lawrence E. Hawkins, a spokesman with the state Department of Food and Agriculture. "But if somebody wants to increase their margin of safety by leaving and going to another area ..."

That comment brought boos from the crowd, who said they had jobs to tend to.

They then asked if any of the state officials lived in the area of treatment.

None of them do.

But the ag department said it believes aerial spraying, which



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Unsatisfied with the answers they got from state officials at a meeting about the light brown apple moth Wednesday, concerned residents confronted state Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura, at right, for more answers.

is scheduled between 8 p.m. and 5 a.m. Nov. 4-9, is "an emergency." The moth, they say, could cause millions of dollars in crop damage — as is the case in Australia, its native country.

Known to feed on some 250 plants, the moth was first sighted by a UC Berkeley entomologist in the winter of 2006. He

verified his find in February 2007 after sending it to a lab in Australia, according to California Department of Agriculture spokesman Steve Lyle.

Since then, the moths have reproduced at a rapid clip, causing concern among state and federal officials, who've compared the infestation to a forest fire

Light Brown Apple Moth Spraying

WHERE: Scotts Valley, Santa Cruz, Capitola, Live Oak, Soquel, Aptos, Las Lomas, Aromas, Prunedale and Salinas.

WHEN: 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. Nov. 4-9.

WHY: Control breeding of light brown apple moth.

COST: \$2.7 million.

INFORMATION: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/ea/downloads/lbam_ea_sc.pdf

SOURCE: California Department of Agriculture

that needs to be put out, particularly in Santa Cruz County, where more than 6,000 moths have been trapped, the majority in the Live Oak and Soquel area.

Ag department officials fear local nurseries, already feeling the effects of state and federal quarantines, aren't the only ones who will be suffering if the moth population is unattended. Crops, such as apples, grapes, even strawberries could be next in line, officials said.

"Are you saying that crops are more important than our people?" asked a visibly shaken Peggy Fleming, diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001, who fears the pes-

ticide could affect her recovery efforts.

To date, however, crop damage has been limited to nursery growers saddled with restrictions of shipments and inspections ushered in by state and federal quarantines.

There are some who believe the moth may have been around for years undetected, a theory the state has rejected outright, saying it conducted a pest survey in 2005 and found none.

Not all residents were opposed to the spraying.

June Cocha, who was initially concerned, said she had a long talk with company representatives over the telephone and she now thinks they've come up with a safe product.

"They're trying to get as close to nature as possible," she said.

Dan Harder, however, said he's having a hard time buying the concept of aerial spraying.

A director of the UCSC Arboretum, he said "There's not one study that has ever proved it to work."

Dave Lommen, a Santa Cruz resident, said he'd like to see sterile moths released into the air as a form of disrupting the mating process.

Contact Tom Ragan at tragan@santacruzsentinel.com.