

Moth

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industry. But critics contend the threat is exaggerated and question the effectiveness and safety of mass spraying.

If there were supporters of the state's aerial spraying plan, they weren't around to speak up Thursday.

With protest signs at times ringing the conference room during a meeting that sometimes grew contentious, residents said the department needs to pay attention to accounts of people who said they were sickened following aerial spraying of a synthetic pheromone last November over Santa Cruz County.

"I experienced eye irritation that lasted several days that caused me discomfort and embarrassment at work," said Live Oak resident Terrence Willett.

He also expressed concern about the microcapsules used in the spraying and said the environmental report needed to focus on them.

"I think it is an unmitigatable environmental impact," he said.

A string of residents said they were sickened by last year's spraying, with respiratory illness often mentioned.

Cheryl Ahleen Lupo of Santa Cruz said the report needed to address spraying's effect on farms and other insects.

"Is this going to damage bees and other pollinating insects that we need?" she said.

She also said she was concerned about organic farms and if they would qualify as organic if they had the synthetic pheromone sprayed on the crops.

Residents called for the environmental review to look at ways to better track reported illnesses along with examining the impacts on wildlife and groundwater.

A recurring theme of the evening was that environmental review should have been done before spraying began in the first place.

"It seems to me this meeting is a day late and a dollar short," Santa Cruz County Supervisor Neal Coonerty said.

The state is taking comments through March 20 as to what issues to include in the report. The report will evaluate the environmental impacts of possible approaches to fighting the moth, something many speakers said should be done before spraying commences again.

A draft of the environmental report is expected by this fall, at which time more public informational meetings will be held, but another round of spraying is scheduled in June under emergency provisions of state law.

Some 16,500 light brown apple moths have been detected in the state since early 2007, said Bob Dowell of the Department of Food and Agriculture.

He said the state wants to address the moth now before it spreads and resident begin individually using pesticides to kill them.

Controversy erupted last year when the state sprayed Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties with the pheromone. That was done under emergency provisions of the law that allowed the spraying to proceed without an environmental review.

Aerial spraying is slated to resume on the Central Coast June 1, but state officials have not decided what product will be used.

The products CheckMate OLR-F and CheckMate LBAM-F were used last fall, but the state Agriculture Department wants to find something that will last longer in the environment for this year's spraying.

And that spraying could hinge on possible legislative or legal

action. State Sen. Carole Migden, D-San Francisco, is crafting a resolution calling for a moratorium on spraying in her district until the products used can be absolutely determined to be safe. Spraying is slated to begin this August in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Assemblyman John Laird, D-Santa Cruz, said he would announce a package of bills today aimed at addressing the LBAM issue.

Also, Santa Cruz County later joined by the city, sued the state seeking to force completion of an environmental review report before spraying commences again. A hearing on that is set for March 6 in Superior Court.

Among alternatives under consideration to supplement spraying include unleashing a breed of stingerless wasp that attack the moths' eggs and use of pheromone-infused twist ties applied to utility poles and street trees and another that calls for handheld spraying of plants and trees with a substance called *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or Bt.

Eradicating the moth is crucial to protecting the state's crops, agriculture officials say. Failure to get rid of the moths could cost the state up to \$640 million per year in crop loss, according to the state. Critics counter that the claims of losses are inflated and that spraying is an ineffective way to battle the pest, which is native of Australia.

The state Department of Food and Agriculture received 330 illness reports after the moth-spraying program began. Hundreds more were contained in a report by the group called the California Alliance to Stop the Spray.

Eradicating the moth is expected to take up to five years to complete, according to the state agriculture department.

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