

State: Spray alternatives worse

If pheromones disallowed, more lethal apple moth pesticide on tap

Light brown apple moth

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SANTA CRUZ — State agriculture leaders issued a warning to the city and county Monday that if plans are delayed to spray pheromone over the county by plane to fight the light brown apple moth, another, more potent insecticide could be dropped instead.

“The risk of greater conventional pesticide is out there,” said Steve Lyle,

spokesman for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, elaborating on a position outlined in a legal brief released Monday.

The document was filed in response to a city and county lawsuit that demands an environmental review before more of the synthetic pheromone CheckMate LBAM-F is sprayed over the county. Some residents were furious last fall when airplanes hired by the state flew over the city and parts of the county dropping the

pheromone, which confuses male moths and stops them from mating.

The state initiated the spraying last November after Santa Cruz County reported the state’s highest infestation of light brown apple moth, an invasive pest from Australia. If left unchecked, state officials argue, the moth could wreak havoc on California agriculture. Others argue the threat is overblown.

The state argued in its brief that a delay in spraying the pheromone to fight

the moth would allow more of the winged creatures to reproduce. To kill them all, a stronger insecticide would be required. In addition, state attorneys wrote, residents would likely pick up pesticides themselves to fight the pest in their gardens.

The pesticide at issue is bacillus thuringiensis, or Bt, which the brief describes as “an insecticide that is a