

Moth Spraying Opponents Brace to Fight Next Round of Spraying in New Year

Light brown apple moth

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by Michael Thomas

Officials from the California Department of Food and Agriculture are collecting apple moths from traps this month, getting the first look at whether aerial spraying of a pheromone disrupted the moth's mating behavior in November.

For the moment, CDFA spokesman Steve Lyle said the second round of spraying has yet to be finalized.

"Nothing has been scheduled. Nothing is definitive at this point," he said. "The prevalent activity is trapping and surveying the population to evaluate what we did this year ... and to look at the biology of the bug and how it behaves in California during a period where it might be dormant."

The moth was first recognized in Berkeley in February of 2007, so this is the first winter that officials have been able to study its behavior in California.

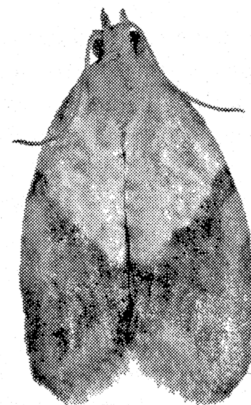
Throughout the county, many are still frustrated by what they believe is an untested chemical being applied for an unproven emergency.

"I personally was very healthy until I got sprayed," said Felton resident Liz Koch. "I've been working for weeks to get detoxified."

Most of the San Lorenzo Valley is outside of the spraying area, according to maps released by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). Koch was driving home through the Santa Cruz area when a plane passed over her vehicle.

The CDFA ordered the spraying to protect regional agriculture from the Australian invasive species. Officials say the apple moth can wreak havoc on crops, but it has yet to be discovered in Central Coast farmlands.

However, it has been trapped just about everywhere else. Santa Cruz County is the epicenter of the West Coast apple moth outbreak.



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Chemicals Said Not to be Harmful

Unlike traditional pesticides, the pheromone, manufactured under the brand name Checkmate LBAM-F, does not disrupt nervous system operation or cause direct harm. Less is known about the chemicals that are mixed with the pheromones to facilitate aerial spraying.

The substance is said to mimic a scent released by

female apple moths, confusing amorous males so that they wander aimlessly rather than finding a mate.

Officials say the pheromones have no known effect on humans or organisms other than apple moths. The strategy is supported by the Natural Resources Defense Council, Monarch Watch and other environmental groups.

Locally, only seven people have filed formal reports with CDFA recounting adverse health impacts from the spraying. However, CDFA also received well over a hundred telephone complaints about the spraying in general.

Since driving underneath one of the spraying planes, Koch said she has experienced sensations in her lungs, lymphatic disruption and a persistent cold.

Town Hall Meeting Draws Large Crowd

Koch helped organize a town hall meeting on Dec. 9 in the Santa Cruz City Council

chambers, where over 200 concerned residents gathered to consider their options.

Santa Cruz Council member Tony Madrigal wanted to form a seven-member task force to hear residents' concerns, advise the Council and collaborate with other agencies.

At the Council's meeting the following Tuesday, Madrigal's motion to create the task force failed for lack of a second.

"I am really disappointed at their not being willing to establish a process for the community to have input," Madrigal said.

However, Santa Cruz City Council members previously voted to take the CDFA to court over the lack of an environmental impact review for the spraying.

"We are still pursuing that lawsuit and the city attorney says we hope to get a hearing in January," Madrigal said.

Koch said that opponents are prepared to fight the next round of spraying but couldn't say what specific actions they would take. ■