

# Moth

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County residents went into an uproar last summer, when the state announced it would drop a chemical pheromone, CheckMate LBAM-F, over urban areas to fight the light brown apple moth, an invasive pest from Australia. If left unchecked, state officials said the moth could wreak havoc on California agriculture; to catch it in time, they said, an environmental review would not be possible. Spraying began in November.

City and county leaders vehemently disagreed and sued the state. Meanwhile, after stopping over the winter, spraying is set to resume over parts of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties in June.

The moth "isn't an emergency. We've known about it for quite a while," said Santa Cruz city Attorney John Barisone.

The legal brief argues that the state knew in 1995 that the moth was "highly likely" to establish itself in the United States. However, no environmental studies were done on how best to fight it.

Instead, state administrators waited and "made what seems to be a private, behind-the-doors decision to spray," said county Supervisor Mark Stone. He accused the state of declaring an illegal "emergency" to circumvent the environmental review that normally would be required before airplanes could drop pesticides in populated areas.

An environmental study likely would show that other, viable alternatives exist to fight the moth, Stone said.

Even if spraying continues after an environmental review, Barisone said, a study would explain to the public what is landing on their rooftops and why.

Instead, residents remain in a panic, he said.

But that hasn't been enough to sway the state. California Department of Food and Agriculture spokesman Steve Lyle defended his office's emergency declaration Thursday.

"We believe we are operating within [the California Environmental Quality Act], and we're looking forward to presenting on that point in court," Lyle said.

If the city and county prevail, though, Barisone said the fight might not be over.

Instead, the state could conduct an environmental review but adopt a "statement of overriding consideration" and continue with the spraying, Barisone said.

But Supervisor Neal Coonerty fears something bigger.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has expressed support for the state's eradication efforts, and Coonerty worries the state will call in federal officials to continue spraying for the moth, regardless of what a judge rules.

"What I fear is that, eventually, the [USDA] will just take it over and spray the hell out of Northern California — and enjoy every minute of it," Coonerty said.