

# Moth

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"If you want to come spray our city, we need more than an hour and a half," he said, referring to the time of the state's presentation and the public hearing.

Councilman Tony Madrigal, who started the evening asking the state Department of Food and Agriculture officials pointed questions, including the extent of the appeal process, seconded the motion.

Madrigal said he is concerned about the lack of answers on the safety of the pesticide — a biochemical that would be sprayed by three planes for six consecutive nights at 500 feet between Nov. 4-9, from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m.

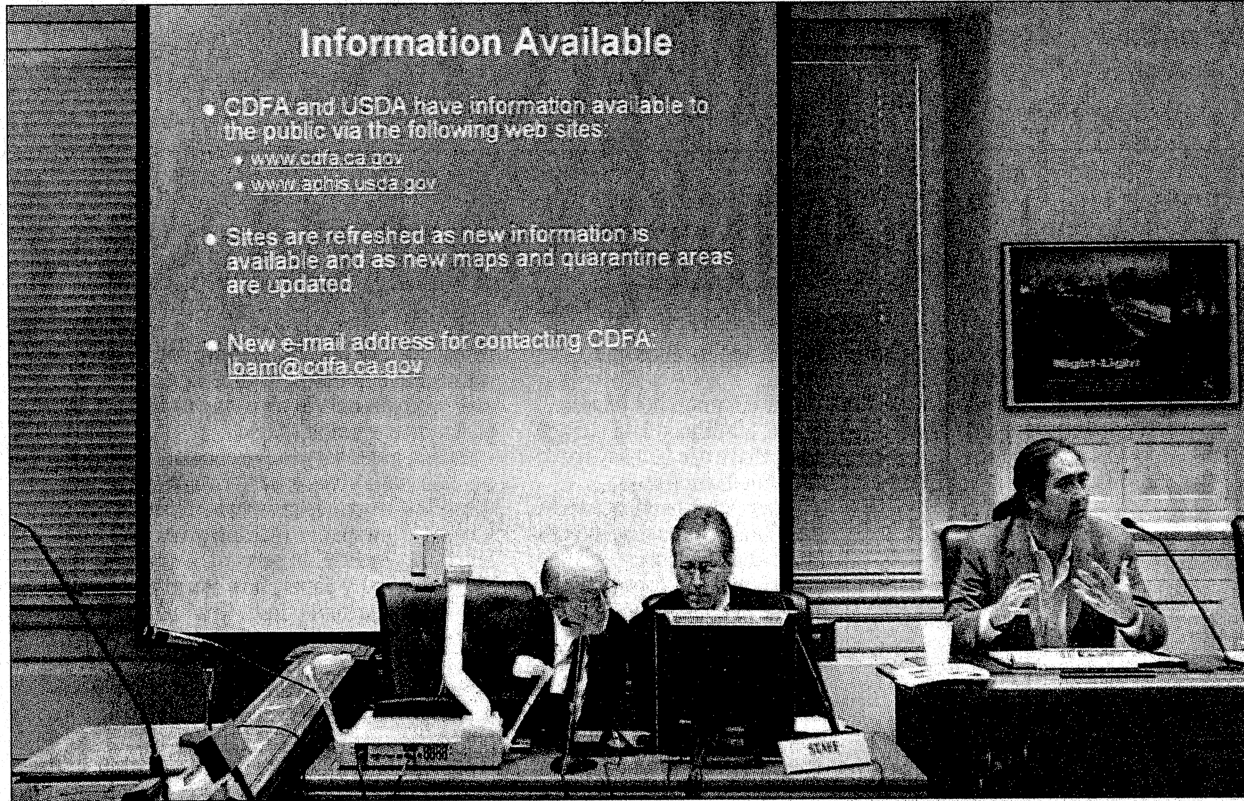
"I've heard you say that there's 'no evidence' that it will cause harm," Madrigal said of the pheromone. "But I haven't heard you say, 'Yes, this is safe.'"

Those opposed to taking the case to court were council members Lynn Robinson, Ryan Coonerty and Cynthia Mathews. Robinson thought more facts needed to be gathered in what she called "a fact-finding mission." Coonerty thought the issue fell more within the jurisdiction of the county because it was agriculture-related, and Mathews thought legal recourse was "vastly overreaching."

Those in favor of filing suit were Porter; Mike Rotkin, who said he didn't fully grasp the state's "sense of urgency" to start spraying within a month; and Reilly, who said the council was under a "time constraint" as the state plans to start spraying Nov. 4.

In his vote, Rotkin said he didn't want to be "misread. I don't want people to think I'm a champion of never using a pheromone."

Kawamura said he wasn't surprised by the council action, but wished the people, including the council, would take a look



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

California Secretary of Agriculture A.G. Kawamura, right, answers questions during the Santa Cruz City Council meeting Tuesday while Department of Agriculture staff work to research their responses to concerns raised during the session.

at what he called "the bigger picture" — the problems the moths could cause if not kept in check.

"We're still seeing a resistance and a resentment by the people who don't want government to interfere with their lives," he said.

He added that many of the state's eradication programs are often carried out without a hitch — or harm. Similar eradication efforts are nearly complete in Monterey County, he said. The final treatment, which was scheduled for Tuesday

night, was delayed due to rain in the forecast. A lawsuit filed on behalf of Helping Our Peninsula's Environment, a nonprofit environmental group, is also pending in Monterey County Superior Court on the basis that the pheromone could hurt people and the environment.

Since the spraying in Monterey, more than 100 people have complained of sore throats, bouts of coughing and breathing problems, according to the lawsuit. The Monterey County Department of Health is uncertain there's a link between the

spraying and the illnesses, said Dr. Hugh Stallworth, the county's public health officer.

"Two things confound the possibility that symptoms are caused by spraying," he said. "One is that September is a month when allergies are either continuing or starting to kick up. And this is the time of year when kids go back to school, and we tend to see upper respiratory infections that kids are sharing or bringing home."

The pheromone essentially replicates

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COUNCILMAN TONY MADRIGAL

the scent of a female moth and is released in a tiny biodegradable capsule. It's designed to disrupt the mating process by confusing thousands of male moths in Santa Cruz County and Northern Monterey County, one of the largest infested areas along the Central Coast.

The state contends the pheromone isn't a pesticide in the true sense of the word because it doesn't kill the moths. Moreover, the product has been registered by the EPA and has been classified as low in toxicity.

Although the long-term effects on humans are unknown, it's been used in Australia for a decade with no reported harmful consequences — but in rural areas, not urban.

The state insists the moths need to be eliminated, and that California is already on the radar in other parts of the country as a place to be on the lookout due to the pest. That's bad news for growers.

Other countries, too, are concerned about the moth, an invasive species that feeds on some 250 plant varieties and has been reproducing at a rapid clip on the Central Coast since it was first spotted late last year. The moth affects mostly nurseries, which have been saddled with state and federal quarantines and huge costs to keep the moth in check.

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