

EPA bans vegetable pesticide that can harm fetuses

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In an historic move, the Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday banned the use of a pesticide that can harm fetuses.

Known as dimethyl tetrachloroterephthalate (DCPA or Dacthal), the weedkiller is used on a variety of crops, including broccoli, onions, kale, Brussels sprouts and cabbage.

However, when a [pregnant woman](#) is exposed to the chemical, it can alter fetal thyroid hormone levels, the EPA explained in announcing the [ban](#). That can lead to [low birth weight](#), impaired [brain development](#), lower IQ and motor skill issues, the agency added.

"DCPA is so dangerous that it needs to be removed from the market immediately," Michal Freedhoff, assistant administrator for the EPA's Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, said in an agency [news release](#) on the emergency order.

"It's EPA's job to protect people from exposure to dangerous chemicals," Freedhoff added. "In this case, pregnant women who may never even know they were exposed could give birth to babies that experience irreversible lifelong health problems. That's why for the first time in almost 40 years, EPA is using its emergency suspension authority to stop the use of a pesticide."

DCPA has been banned in the European Union since 2009, NBC News reported.

Environmental groups applauded the move, if not its late timing.

"The EPA's decision to finally suspend DCPA is welcome news, but it's long overdue," Environmental Working Group (EWG) Senior Toxicologist Alexis Temkin, said in a [statement](#). "For years, EWG and other public health advocates have warned about the serious risks the weedkiller poses to farmworkers, pregnant people and other vulnerable populations."

"Countless people have been exposed to DCPA while the EPA abdicated its responsibility," Temkin added. "The agency should have taken action decades ago, when it first identified the human health risks posed by this toxic crop chemical."

Farmworker groups also applauded the ban, which takes effect immediately.

Mily Treviño Saucedo, executive director of Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, a national organization of women farmworkers, called the decision "historic."

"As an organization led by farmworker women, we know intimately the harm that pesticides, including dimethyl tetrachloroterephthalate [DCPA or Dacthal], can inflict on our bodies and communities," Saucedo said in the EPA news release. "This emergency decision is a great first step that we hope will be in a series of others that are based on listening to farmworkers, protecting our reproductive health and safeguarding our families."

The DCPA ban followed a decade of back-and-forth between the EPA and the sole manufacturer of DCPA, the AMVAC Chemical Corp. The company did not respond to a request for comment, NBC News reported.

The EPA said its recent review of DCPA was part of a process in which registered pesticides are re-analyzed every 15 years, to make sure they have no adverse health effects and are not harmful to the environment.

More information: The Environmental Protection Agency has more on [DCPA](#).

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