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2002 Drift Conference A Breath of Fresh Air

By Carol Ramsay, Pesticide Education Coordinator, WSU

Under the direction of Sherman Takatori, Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), the Pesticide Applicator's Drift Conference was held February 5 and 6, 2002 in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Appreciation e-mails from attendees started arriving on February 7, attesting to the success of the conference, which attracted over 150 attendees.

Pat Takasugi, ISDA Director, opened the conference with his thoughts about American agriculture. He stated the need for increased respect and appreciation for American agriculture and challenged the American public and policy makers to recognize that American agriculture operates under the highest overall global production standards, responding to social, health, and environmental regulations imposed on both the state and federal levels. Key message: Buy American!

The legal implications of drift were discussed in detail. Dennis Gardisser, University of Arkansas, told the audience tales about being an expert witness in drift litigation. Stressing the importance of accurate and thorough documentation, his bottom-line message was "Keep it All!" Applicators must document their professionalism, keeping records even for those instances where the decision was made not to apply. Mary Feeny, Idaho Deputy Attorney General, presented the legal foundation for civil litigation including negligence, nuisance, strict liability, and trespass. She discussed the Idaho



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state codes to which Idaho applicators should refer. Her message was “DRIFT: Do Remember Investigate First Thing.” She advocates investigating the application site and neighboring properties for sensitivities prior to conducting the job.

One of the hottest topics of the conference was presented by Jay Ellenberger from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Pesticide Programs (EPA OPP). Ellenberger presented EPA’s proposal for guidance drift label language. To a diverse audience, including specialists in turf and ornamentals, agriculture, forestry, and rights of way, he explained some of the background, terminology, and reasoning behind the proposed changes. Conference attendees had the opportunity to talk with Ellenberger in person in addition to attending his informative presentation. It is not every day that we have the key EPA representative from Washington, D.C. here in the Pacific Northwest. For those *AENews* readers who were unable to attend the conference and share their views with Ellenberger, the deadline for comments has been extended to March 31, 2002. Go to Internet URL http://www.epa.gov/opppmsd1/PR_Notices/prdraft-spraydrift801.htm .

Barbara Morrissey, Washington State Department of Health, presented information on alleged and confirmed pesticide incidents. She detailed drift-related cases and whether cases were related to agricultural or non-agricultural settings. Jim Baker, ISDA, discussed risk assessment. Both speakers provided evidence supporting the case for drift management.

The conference also included a number of technical presentations in which issues were discussed such as the new droplet spectrum classification system, application technology (different sprayers, new nozzles, spray adjuvants), establishment of “no spray zones” or buffer zones, and the use of integrated pest management.

Attendees from Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington had the opportunity to meet for an hour with their states’ regulators and educators to discuss current state-specific issues on pesticide drift or application.

A session on how the media report drift and other agricultural issues was quite popular. Three media representatives (two from print and one from radio) openly fielded audience questions about story decision-making, reporter interviews, headlines, media bias, and media accountability. The panel members all did a superb job of detailing their professional decisions and were applauded for their gumption and their willingness to give up their morning for the honor of being grilled.

Quality meetings such as this help pesticide applicators and regulators stay on top of their business and increase their professionalism. EPA Region X is acknowledged as

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the key contributor for the conference. I represented Washington State University and contributed by contacting preeminent speakers in the field of drift mitigation. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's conference staff is recognized for their efforts in coordinating a top-notch conference.

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