1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Pesticides Forum on PSD’s pilot study on disclosure of pesticide spray records.

Background

2. Members may recall that this study is intended to address the concern of some members of the public who wish to know, for whatever reason, what pesticides are being sprayed in the vicinity of their homes. It is being run out by PSD’s Information Services Branch which has ‘call centre’ and enquiry recording systems and staff with experience of dealing with enquiries from the public. The aim of the study is to try to get a realistic picture of the likely level of public demand for information on what pesticides are being used in the trial area.

3. The study commenced on the 1st March 2007 and covers homes and farms in parts of four counties in the East Midlands -- Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Anyone wishing to get information on local pesticide spraying have been encouraged to approach the farmer directly and allow them a reasonable time in which to provide the information. PSD has written to the farmers in the pilot project area to tell them about the trial and what they should do if someone asks for information on the pesticides they have used. If it is not possible for any reason for an enquirer to contact the farmer directly they are invited to contact the Pesticides Safety Directorate’s Information Services by telephone, letter or e-mail. However it should be noted that the pilot study is not set up to investigate cases of harm that may be caused by pesticides. The Government already has systems in place to deal with pesticide related cases of ill health in people or animals.

Publicity

4. PSD employed a Public Relations firm to deliver a media and stakeholder communications campaign to highlight the pilot. We wrote to all the residents and farmers in the study area to advise them of the commencement of the study and placed an article on the PSD website. A local Press Release was also prepared by PSD and the Public Relations firm and circulated to all local press and key stakeholders within the study area. There was some initial interest in the
pilot exercise with fairly positive and balanced articles in publications such as the Farmers’ Guardian and Farmers' Weekly.

5. The regional media did not really pick up on the story. So later, in the main spraying season, the PR company placed a public notice in the local press in order to continue the awareness-raising exercise. However to date this has not resulted in any immediate significant increase in numbers of requests from the public.

Requests for spray records

6. To date we have received and dealt with 9 requests for spray records from people living in the study area. Each one has been dealt with within a month, often much quicker. Where spraying has taken place, we have successfully located the sprayed fields, contacted the land owner and sent the relevant information to the enquirer. In some cases spraying has not actually occurred and we were able to report this back. We are content with the effectiveness of Defra’s SPIRE mapping system and the RPA’s Rural Land Registry in helping us locate sprayed fields. There has been just one occasion when we could not locate the fields.

Feedback

7. One farmer expressed his concerns over members of the public approaching him directly for spray records. We explained that the purpose of the trial was to provide an alternative mechanism for use in those circumstances where direct approaches to the farmer to disclose spray records were not an option.

Evaluation

8. Once the pilot is complete at the end of August, we will evaluate the results and write a full report. The report will help inform Ministers’ decisions about the way forward.

Pesticides Safety Directorate
4th June 2007