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# Scientists Appalled that California May Spray Strawberries with a Carcinogen

by [Sarah Parsons](#) June 21, 2010 11:30 AM (PT) Topics: [food policy](#), [Health](#), [Industrial Farming](#), [Toxics](#)

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"Death by strawberry" sounds like a dessert, but it may be a real, literal event if California regulators get their way. The [California Department of Pesticide Regulation \(CDPR\)](#) is [poised to approve](#) the use of methyl iodide in pesticides. Once approved, methyl iodide, a known carcinogen and overall scary substance, would be used mostly to fumigate soils in the state's strawberry fields.

The problem is that the state's strawberries are really the country's strawberries—[according to NPR](#), California produces about 90 percent of the fruits. And an even bigger problem is that methyl iodide is totally noxious. As [Change.org reported before](#), methyl iodide is a carcinogen and neurotoxin that's used in lab settings to grow cancer cells. Exposure to the substance can also cause miscarriages.

[New information](#) paints an even scarier picture of methyl iodide. Carcinogen, neurotoxin, and miscarriage-inducer—it's hard to believe, but unfortunately the chemical's reputation can get worse. Staff scientists and an independent review panel who examined methyl iodide say that the chemical's use in California could be catastrophic. "I honestly think that this chemical will cause disease and illness," John Froines, a chemist and chair of the scientific review panel, [told NPR](#). "And so does everyone on the committee."

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In fact, according to the committee's assessment, methyl iodide would only be safe for workers at levels of 0.8 parts per billion or less. CDPR, however, is proposing a limit of 96 parts per billion, 120 times the level deemed safe by the scientific review panel. What gives? Does CDPR have some secret vendetta against strawberry-eaters and California wildlife?

Well, according to Mary-Ann Warmerdam, CDPR's director, the EPA says methyl iodide is safe at levels of 193 parts per billion. But here's why that justification is, well, unjustified: The EPA approved methyl iodide back in 2007 under the Bush administration. Even the most conservative environmentalists agree that most EPA decisions made under the Bush administration were total hogwash. The chemical's approval was controversial then, and it's even more inflammatory now that it's been studied extensively by staff and independent scientists. [According to an NPR report](#), EPA officials are even saying they may take another look at methyl iodide depending on what happens in California.

The fact that the EPA may reverse its ruling on methyl iodide is exactly why California needs to deny approval of this chemical. The public has til June 29th to cause a ruckus and persuade CDPR that approving methyl iodide would be a big mistake. The agency obviously isn't listening to scientists, who said straight up that they are actually *afraid* of the chemical. Make your voice heard by [signing our petition](#) telling CDPR that you want your strawberries without the splash of carcinogens.

Photo credit: [Hannah 50 via Wikimedia Commons](#)



[Sarah Parsons](#) is Change.org's Sustainable Food Editor. Her work has appeared in Popular Science, OnEarth, Audubon and Plenty.

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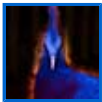


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