



Background Information on Vinclozolin's Regulatory History and Human Health Concerns

In 1997, Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United (PCUN) and the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP) learned that agricultural representatives were requesting an “emergency exemption” to use vinclozolin for the fifteenth consecutive year, despite a five-year regulatory maximum for such exemptions. The manufacturer, upon learning of the pending opposition to the exemption, then applied to register the pesticide for use on snap beans.

Soon after, the EPA authorized the use of vinclozolin on snap beans without determining how much of the pesticide could legally remain on beans bound for people’s dinner tables. Permitting this use without establishing legal residue limits is in violation of federal law.

With the help of Patti Goldman, senior attorney with the Seattle office of Earthjustice, PCUN and NCAP filed an action in federal court to immediately halt the use of vinclozolin until the residue level was established. Four days after the court filing, EPA issued what it declared to be a safe level.

Over the next three years, PCUN and three environmental groups including Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Environmental Working Group challenged EPA’s authorization of vinclozolin use on snap beans. The groups challenged the registration on the grounds that the scientific literature showed that the residues that remain on food would negatively impact human health. Vinclozolin disrupts the proper function of hormonal systems in animals by blocking male sex hormones. The scientific literature has documented disturbing effects in developing fetuses when pregnant females are exposed to the chemical. They also held that the EPA had failed to comply with the food safety requirements of the new Food Quality Protection Act. As a result of these actions, vinclozolin tolerances for many different uses were withdrawn. When the remaining vinclozolin uses still led to unsafe levels on food, EPA and the manufacturer negotiated a phase-out of food uses of vinclozolin that will eliminate uses on snap beans and other foods by the end of 2004.

At a meeting with stakeholders, however, EPA indicated that growers and states could seek to reinstate the cancelled uses to deal with emergency situations. Fearful that cancelled uses of vinclozolin would re-emerge through requests for exemptions granted before the public has an opportunity to learn of or object to them, PCUN and the Coalition pressed for a better process. The groups obtained the assurances that they would receive prior notice and EPA would consider their objections before acting on any such requests. This agreement should prevent a recurrence of the continuous granting of emergency authorizations for use of this pesticide.

The agreement can be viewed on NCAP's web site at www.pesticide.org.