

Champion of COVID Response

R5 Champion of COVID 19 Team

Environmental Protection Agency



Summary:

The EPA Region 5 COVID-19 Team demonstrated exceptional commitment to protecting human health by assuring that pesticide products connected to COVID-19 are safe, legal, and effective.

Description: On March 13, 2020 the United States declared a national emergency concerning the COVID-19 outbreak. To protect themselves, millions of Americans sought antimicrobial products, disinfectants, sanitizers, cleaning products and devices. The marketplace responded to that demand by offering numerous products claiming to kill SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The public depends on these products to protect themselves and their families, but what if the products are untested or ineffective? The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) requires these types of pesticide products to be registered by EPA and prohibits companies from making false or misleading claims for pesticides or devices. EPA Region 5 immediately deployed a COVID-19 Team to address the myriad of tips it received about companies selling unregistered pesticides or making false or misleading pesticidal claims. Pesticide products reviewed by the team included imported necklaces which claimed to create a virus free barrier for the wearer, antimicrobial gloves marketed to healthcare providers, booths designed to spray members of a health club with disinfectant, an ultra-violet device marketed to disinfect ambulances, and an unregistered pesticide marketed to prevent Covid-19 in cheese-making. To date the team evaluated more than 140 tips for potential violations and took prompt action to protect the public from dangerous products, while clearing the way for the distribution of compliant products. The Team issued more than 40 actions to companies notifying them of potential non-compliance. In some cases, the team required the removal of false or misleading claims from labels and/or that the company stop the sale of non-compliant pesticide products until they demonstrate a return to compliance with FIFRA.

The team coordinated with states, other regional EPA offices, criminal investigators and government agencies (including U.S. Customs and Border Patrol) to effectively address non-compliant products. All the while, the team directly assisted the public. Beginning in March 2020, the team responded to hundreds of telephone and email inquiries from individuals, corporations and schools related to COVID-19, primarily regarding the use of disinfectants to kill the virus. The team formed alliances with states to educate users on how to apply disinfectants to surfaces.

The actions of the team prohibited the introduction of non-compliant pesticides or devices into homes, businesses, daycares, schools, and hospitals across the U.S. and led to public health protections for Americans. By addressing complex issues and inquiries, the team showed exceptional leadership and persistence to solve public health issues and ensure the safe and effective disinfectant use in our fight to contain the COVID-19 pandemic

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