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# House Votes to Ban Human Studies of Pesticides

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The House voted late Thursday to bar the Environmental Protection Agency from conducting or accepting any studies that test pesticides on humans, attempting to quell a growing controversy over whether federal scientists were encouraging families to expose their young children to harmful toxins.

Last month, the administration, under pressure from congressional Democrats, canceled an EPA study that would have paid 60 Florida families nearly $1,000 each over two years to monitor their babies' and young children's exposure to pesticides. The language the lawmakers adopted this week would bar the agency from doing such a project, as well as from using data from a privately run survey conducted along similar lines.

Rep. Hilda L. Solis (D-Calif.), who with Rep. Tim Bishop (D-N.Y.) sponsored the amendment to legislation funding the EPA's 2006 budget, said she was "a little taken off guard" that the House adopted her proposal by voice vote.

"I was expecting a fight," Solis said in an interview yesterday, adding that a coalition of religious and environmental groups had lobbied for the ban. "The public is on our side. . . . It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out morally this is not the right thing to do."

Federal officials have struggled for years with whether to use data from tests on people to set nationwide limits for pesticide exposure. President Bill Clinton banned the practice, a move President Bush overturned upon taking office. The reversal sparked a public protest, prompting the president to put the policy on hold while the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) reviewed the policy.

In 2004, the NAS issued a report outlining scientific protocols for conducting human tests with pesticides, and the administration now accepts results of human studies on a case-by-case basis.

EPA officials, who saw Solis's amendment just a few hours before it reached the House floor, said they are reviewing the language to determine whether they will fight the

measure when lawmakers hammer out a final bill.

"We're still looking at what this means," said EPA spokeswoman Eryn Witcher.

Michael A. Grodin, who directs medical ethics at Boston University's School of Medicine, said lawmakers have to make sure they are not undermining needed research in the name of protecting children.

"You have to do studies; the question is how can you ethically do them," Grodin said. "Otherwise, how do you know if [pesticides] are safe or unsafe?"

But several environmental advocates said they will continue to resist the use of human testing in setting federal health standards. Leaders of the Falls Church-based Center for Health, Environment and Justice, which generated 80,000 letters in opposition to the EPA's Florida pesticide study, and other activists said they will fight to ensure senators include the ban in the final EPA budget bill.

"Representatives Solis's and Bishop's amendment puts EPA's testing policies back on solid ethical footing," said Richard Wiles, senior vice president of the Environmental Working Group. "The federal government must not in any way support the highly unethical practice of dosing people with pesticides. These tests are even more repugnant when one considers that their sole purpose is to weaken public health protections."

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