



Country Leader Tamworth (insert)

Monday 30/11/2009

Page: 1
Section: General News
Region: Tamworth NSW, AU
Circulation: 29000
Type: Regional
Size: 590.04 sq.cms.



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Cotton Australia regional manager James Houlihan says all farmers and agricultural spray applicators should be aware of the dangers of herbicide drift



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AN ESTIMATED \$9.2 million was lost in production to cotton producers because of herbicide drift in the 2008-09 growing season.

This equates to 16,000 hectares or about 11 per cent of the national crop and Cotton Australia's NSW regional manager James Houlahan said the chemicals, particularly 2,4D from the phenoxy group of herbicides, were the cause of the damage.

"This is unacceptable, particularly given that this damage is entirely

preventable and particularly also that this damage occurred in spite of a major media and awareness campaign by Cotton Australia to alert people to the potential of spray drift," he said.

A key strategy by Cotton Australia this season will centre on a web-based map, clearly identifying all areas of planted cotton.

"It's a web-based, online program which allows growers or their consultants to map their cotton fields, providing an up-to-date picture of

where cotton crops are being grown in all valleys across the industry.

"Cotton growers and consultants can log on to the website www.cottonmap.com.au and those who are familiar with Google Earth will find that the process of navigating around the site is quite simple.

"On the website there is an option to either type in your farm's address or with the use of a drop-down menu, growers can be directed to their valley and zoom into their farm and specific cotton fields.

There is an easy-to-use mapping tool that allows growers to plot where the perimeters of their actual cotton fields are.

"We really encourage growers to go on and map their fields on this website, because when we do the major launch to other agricultural industries, chemical resellers and applicators, we'd like to be confident that we've got all, or at least the vast majority of fields identified.

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Time to stop pesticide drift

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"We see this as a really important education, awareness and management tool to try and avoid drift onto sensitive crops like cotton," he said.

Mr Houlahan said Cotton Australia was also working closely with herbicide manufacturers and the national pesticide regulator, the APVMA, in a bid to get more clear directions for use of the phenoxy products.

"No one wants the chemicals banned; they're as important to the cotton industry as they are to other growers.

"We are seeking those conditions of use that are currently precautionary statements – in terms of wind speed, spraying at night, avoiding inversions and selection of coarse nozzles – to be highlighted as mandatory requirements.

"That will allow the pesticide regulatory authorities, such as Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water in NSW as well as its Queensland equivalent, to be able to better enforce the proper and responsible use and application of these chemicals.

"What we are also

seeking from the APVMA is mandatory neighbour notification for users of the higher-risk phenoxy products such as 2,4D. If there was better communication between users of these chemicals and their neighbours, then a lot of these problems could be avoided."

Growers and applicators will also have the opportunity to attend free herbicide application training sessions sponsored by Cotton Australia, together with the Grains Research and Development Corporation and the Cotton Research and Develop-

ment Corporation.

Mr Houlahan said people should visit the Cotton Australia website to find out more about herbicide drift, how to prevent it and what to do when a problem occurs.

"On the homepage are some direct links to tools including a neighbour notification template which will help growers to communicate to their neighbours about the fact they're growing cotton this year and the need to take extra care with the use of phenoxy products," he said.

• www.cottonaustralia.com.au