

Tree Care Industry Seeks Uniform Pesticide Rules to Protect Tree Health



Tree care industry urges Congress to establish a uniform approach to fighting invasive species killing trees by vesting state and federal agencies with sole authority to regulate pesticides

The Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) represents approximately 1,400 businesses nationwide that engage in commercial tree care, providing services to residential communities, state and local governments, commercial businesses, and utilities. Collectively, TCIA members employ more than 150,000 people, representing an estimated 75% of all tree care workers in the country.

The tree care industry plays a vital role in managing and maintaining the health of trees and vegetation across various environments, including urban forests, suburban landscapes, rural areas, and utility corridors. These efforts are crucial for preserving the environmental, economic, and safety benefits that trees and vegetation provide to communities and infrastructure nationwide. However, the ability to effectively manage pests and invasive species—essential to the industry’s work—is increasingly threatened by the inconsistent regulation of pesticides at the local level.

The Issue

For many years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has partnered with state agencies to regulate pesticides under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). This collaboration ensures that pesticides are regulated consistently and based on rigorous scientific standards, with state agencies playing a leading role in overseeing the sale, distribution, and use of these products. The officials responsible for this oversight at the state level are typically seasoned professionals with deep expertise in pesticide safety and environmental protection.

State agencies, often within State Departments of Agriculture, have been crucial in working alongside the EPA since the 1970s. They have been tasked with ensuring that pesticide labels are accurate, clear, and designed to be safely used by applicators. Additionally, these agencies have enforced regulations that protect both workers and the environment from the potential hazards of pesticide use. Given their extensive experience and resources, state agencies are uniquely positioned to manage the complexities of pesticide regulation, including the routine inspections and enforcement actions that ensure compliance.

However, there has been a growing trend where local governments regulate pesticides independently, which could disrupt this well-established system. Local governments may lack the scientific expertise and resources necessary to regulate pesticides and may regulate in a

For more information on this issue,
please contact Basil Thomson at Basil@UlmanPolicy.com

manner that compromises pest control efforts, resulting in greater risks to trees and potential harm to the environment. This approach also creates a confusing patchwork of rules that make it difficult for tree care professionals to operate efficiently and safely across different regions.

The Benefits of Responsible Pesticide Use

Responsible pesticide use is integral to the success of the tree care industry and the protection of our nation's green spaces. By enabling effective management of harmful pests and invasive species, pesticides help maintain the health and longevity of trees, which are vital to the environmental and economic well-being of communities. For example, systemic insecticides have been crucial in combating the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive beetle responsible for the widespread destruction of ash trees across the United States. Similarly, the careful use of herbicides along utility corridors prevents the overgrowth of vegetation that could lead to power outages or wildfires. Healthy trees provide shade, improve air quality, reduce energy costs, and increase property values. They also play a critical role in stormwater management and carbon sequestration. By ensuring that pesticides are used safely and effectively, the tree care industry helps protect these benefits for generations to come.

The Solution

To address these concerns, TCIA urges Congress to include language in the Farm Bill reauthorization under FIFRA that codifies regulatory oversight of pesticides at the state level. This legislation should clearly establish that state agencies, working in concert with the EPA, are the primary authorities for regulating pesticide use, preventing local governments from enacting conflicting or uninformed restrictions.

Conclusion

Maintaining state and federal preemption over pesticide regulation is essential for the continued health and safety of America's trees and vegetation. TCIA is committed to working with Congress and other stakeholders to ensure that tree care professionals are equipped to manage pests responsibly and effectively, safeguarding our environment, communities, and infrastructure for the future.