

As Margot Roosevelt [reports](#) in the Los Angeles Times, California's Department of Pesticide Regulation has signaled that it will make a decision before Governor Schwarzenegger leaves office about whether to approve the use of methyl iodide as a strawberry fumigant. Farmworker advocacy groups and environmental advocates fear the pesticide will be approved, and are planning to make a pitch to incoming Governor-elect Jerry Brown about why the pesticide shouldn't be approved.

Methyl iodide is on the State's [list of chemicals "known to the state to cause cancer,"](#) a list it has kept since [Proposition 65](#) passed in 1986. Nonetheless, with the banning of fumigant methyl bromide, the strawberry industry has been eager to get methyl iodide approved as a substitute.

My colleague Tim Malloy has blogged extensively about methyl iodide before. He [noted](#) that in 2008, EPA approved its use, despite serious evidence of carcinogenicity, as a substitute for methyl bromide, which was phased out because of its own environmental problems. (The pesticide still can't be used in California without State approval.) He [explained](#) that the State's scientific peer review panel found that

Based on the data available, we know that methyl iodide is a highly toxic chemical and we expect that any anticipated scenario for the agricultural or structural fumigation use of this agent would result in exposures to a large number of the public and thus would have a significant adverse impact on the public health. Due to the potent toxicity of methyl iodide, its transport in and ultimate fate in the environment, adequate control of human exposure would be difficult, if not impossible.

And Tim also [reported](#) that a group of scientists on CalEPA's Scientific Review Panel were removed from the panel. These scientists included UCLA scientist John Froines, who was on the committee that conducted the peer review of methyl iodide, as well as other scientists who have weighed in on controversial issues.

The L.A. Times has reported on methyl iodide before, in [this article](#) explaining the risks of the pesticide, and [this one](#) about legislators' concerns about what appeared to be "fast-track" approval of the chemical earlier this year.

Approval of the chemical seems unwise, to say the least, given what our scientists

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have concluded about it. The health of our state's farmworkers, our water quality, and our families' well-being is too important to approve such a risky chemical for use in our state. In the meantime, I'll keep buying organic strawberries whenever I can.