News Release

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ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING: Program Rounds Up Abandoned Pesticides

Herbicides and insecticides play a major role in Arkansas agriculture and on farms worldwide. Since the 1940s when regular pesticide use started to replace labor-intensive methods of farming, the government has banned some pesticides because of their detrimental effect on human health and the environment. Farmers abandoned the use of other pesticides when more effective products that required fewer applications became available. One troubling result of these changes was the growing stockpile of abandoned pesticides that could lead to accidental fires, explosions, and contamination of soil, groundwater and waterways.

The Arkansas Legislature addressed this problem with Act 1174 of 1999, the Abandoned Agricultural Pesticide Disposal Act. The Abandoned Pesticide Advisory Board (APAB), created by the act, comprises six members—one from the Arkansas State Plant Board, who will be the chair, one from the Arkansas Farm Bureau, one from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), one from the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, one from the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission and one from the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Board members serve without compensation.
Dean VanDerhoff, ADEQ’s Emergency Response manager, has been on the board since 2006. He said in March that the board has coordinated the removal of just under 2 million pounds of pesticides from Arkansas farms.

The board established a system of collection done on a county by county basis. Farmers submit their pesticide inventories to county Farm Bureau offices, and the board uses them to estimate the equipment, supplies and personnel needed by the hazardous waste contractor to handle collection and disposal.

In 2000, Benton County was chosen as the test county for the first collection, which was funded by a grant from ADEQ. It yielded 31,154 pounds of discarded or banned pesticides.

In 2001, the Legislature enacted Act 1130 to fund the disposal program by requiring pesticide manufacturers to pay a fee for each agricultural pesticide they register in Arkansas. (Act 410 of 1975, the Arkansas Pesticide Control Act, requires all pesticides distributed, sold, or offered for sale in the state to be registered with the Arkansas State Plant Board.) To allow time for funding to accumulate, APAB waited till 2005 to schedule the second collection in the Mississippi River delta region.

Collections have now been held in all Arkansas counties, with more scheduled twice a year through 2018. VanDerhoff said the program will be ongoing to ensure the safe disposal of any pesticides that may be banned in the future and for leftover products that are no longer usable when farmers may have overbought.

VanDerhoff said that farmers who bring pesticides to the collection sites don’t even have to get out of their trucks. The collection service is provided at no cost to the farmers, and they may remain anonymous. The contractor in charge collects the pesticides, packages them, labels
package contents and takes them to a licensed hazardous waste incinerator in Avalon, Tex..

There all the pesticides are sorted, mixed with other chemicals and incinerated to heat brick kilns.