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## **Strawberries Linked to Skin Cancer During Melanoma Awareness Month**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Citing recent unprecedented thinning of the Earth’s protective ozone layer over North America and rising skin cancer rates in the U.S., environmentalists are using Melanoma Awareness Month as an opportunity to call for an urgent end to the use of methyl bromide, an ozone layer-destroying pesticide used in vast quantities by the California strawberry industry.

“Every year 130,000 new melanoma skin cancer cases are diagnosed worldwide. In the U.S., skin cancer kills one American every hour. Yet the California Strawberry Commission leads efforts to continue to use excessive quantities of methyl bromide,” said Danielle Grabel, a campaigner with the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), a non-profit environmental organization in Washington, DC.

Methyl bromide is an acutely powerful ozone layer-destroying chemical that does most of its damage in a very short period of time. Conservative estimates by leading scientists indicate that the immediate ozone-depleting impact of the methyl bromide consumed just by U.S. agriculture is greater than that of the global consumption of any other ozone depleting chemical.

The ozone layer protects life on Earth from harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Children are most vulnerable to elevated levels of radiation from ozone thinning. Childhood skin cancer incidence in the United States has more than doubled in the last two decades, while U.S. skin cancer rates are increasing by 3% a year, according to the American Cancer Society. Last week scientists with Canada’s environmental agency warned the public that harmful ultraviolet rays are expected to rise 4% this year because the ozone layer across Canada has thinned by 4-8% over winter and spring.

“The California Strawberry Commission likes to talk about the health benefits of eating strawberries but conveniently ignores the fact that it is one of the largest consumers of methyl bromide in the world,” Grabel continued.

Because of methyl bromide’s significant short-term impact on the ozone layer, EIA is calling on the California Strawberry Commission to commit to an aggressive schedule to completely phase out its use. “Methyl bromide presents the single greatest threat to the ozone layer over the next 5-10 years when the ozone layer is expected to be at its thinnest level to date. The California strawberry industry has an opportunity and an obligation to protect children and the global environment by ceasing its use of this chemical once and for all,” said Grabel.

**Editor’s Notes:**

- EIA is an independent, international non-profit organization committed to investigating and exposing environmental crimes around the world. EIA works undercover to expose international environmental crime – such as the illegal trade in wildlife, illegal logging and trade in timber species, and the worldwide trade in ozone depleting substances. EIA has been actively tracking the global illegal trade in ozone depleting substances (ODS) since the mid-1990s to provide information to the Montreal Protocol and other relevant bodies.
- The Montreal Protocol was agreed on January 1, 1987 and is now ratified by 188 countries. Under the Montreal Protocol and its amendments, ozone-depleting substances are to be reduced and eliminated through the development of chemical substitutes and alternative manufacturing processes (elimination is the final objective). Methyl bromide was scheduled to be phased out in 2005 in developed countries, but the U.S. has taken advantage of a treaty loophole to continue using excessive quantities of methyl bromide beyond the phase-out date.
- The EU, Japan and most developing countries oppose excessive U.S. demands to continue using methyl bromide past phase-out. There are proven alternatives to methyl bromide that are being used worldwide and in the United States.

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