

## ***National Nursery Issues***

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### ***Methyl Bromide Fumigants - An Update***

As predicted in the last several issues of FNN, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has officially proposed listing methyl bromide (MB) as a Class I Ozone Depletor under the Clean Air Act. The action was published in the March 18, 1993 issue of the Federal Register and will result in a freezing of MB production at 1991 levels and a total ban of the fumigant by the end of the century. It is possible that "essential uses" will be exempt from the ban if no acceptable substitutes are found. Note that this is only a proposal and the EPA is accepting comments on the listing until May 3, 1993. An extension to this short comment period has been requested but don't count on it. So, if you have strong feelings about the possible loss of MB fumigation in your nursery, then please take a few minutes and write a letter to the EPA and your congressional representative. A firm called Economists Incorporated is working on an economic impact statement and they can FAX you a short form to fill out:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Attn: Air Docket No. A-92-13  
401 M Street SW  
Washington, DC 20460

Susan Dudley  
Economists Incorporated  
1233 20th St. NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20036

PHONE: 202-833-5201  
FAX: 202-296-7138

In the meantime, a team of government agricultural experts is looking at alternatives to MB fumigation, analyzing current research, and making a priority list of new research needs. The team's report will be used to develop a workshop on MB alternatives to be held this June. Two USDA-Forest Service (FS) research pathologists, Dick Smith and Steve Fraedrich, are analyzing MB alternatives for forest and conservation nurseries. Last month, they sent questionnaires to federal, state, and private nurseries throughout the US. In addition, they are working with other FS scientists to determine what studies are currently underway on soil fumigation, determine what looks promising, and outline future research needs. One possible outcome from this analysis is the establishment of a FS research program on control of forest nursery pests, including alternatives to soil fumigation.

The FS Forest Pest Management group has recently funded a multi-year study on alternative controls for soilborne diseases. A team of nursery pathologists will be working in forest and conservation nurseries in Florida, Idaho, California, Oregon, and Washington with the following objectives:

1. To develop and evaluate cultural regimes that minimize soilborne disease and maximize seedling quality and outplanting performance
2. To evaluate beneficial microorganisms and "suppressive" soils as disease management tools
3. To develop sampling and assessment methods for predicting soilborne disease.
4. To compare costs and benefits of nursery management with and without fumigation.

Of course, MB fumigation in forest and conservation nurseries is just a small percentage of total agricultural use. Some states have already instituted new restrictions on the use of MB; for example, California now requires that a 1,500 foot buffer strip be left between fumigated areas and inhabited structures. Groups such as the American Association of Nurserymen and the Horticultural Research Institute are also active working on the situation. Two Methyl Bromide Alternative Conferences were held last month in California to discuss soil and commodity fumigation and plan new research on possible alternatives.

Regardless of new research findings, MB will continue to come under attack. Environmental organizations, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, are already convinced that MB is doing "5 times the ozone damage of chlorofluorocarbons" and will continue to push for its immediate ban.

#### References:

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Johnson, B. 1992. *Sudden impact: strawberry, cut flower and other growers say the prospect of losing methyl bromide—an invaluable fumigant—is frightening*. California Farmer, Dec. 1992: 6-7.