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Chemical regulator restricts weed-killer to protect Reef

The use of diuron – a weed killer used on sugarcane, pineapples and other crops grown in areas adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef – has been largely suspended for the coming wet season by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA).

Credit: ScienceImage

According the APVMA, the suspension 'addresses a major concern, which is the risk of diuron runoff into waterways. This includes uses that have high application rates or are applied on tropical crops during the wet season'.

Diuron is used to control weeds in crops and algae in and around water bodies.

The suspension – effective from 28 November 2011 to 31 March 2012 – prohibits diuron use on tropical crops (sugarcane, tea, bananas, pineapples, coffee and paw paw) during the defined no-spray period; and in irrigation channels, drains, industrial and non-agricultural situations.

APVMA's Dr Raj Bhula said the suspension allows for the assessment of new information, including monitoring results from Reef Rescue initiatives.

'The APVMA is yet to make a final decision on diuron; further regulatory action is likely,' he said.

According to an AAP report, the decision anticipates a UN monitoring mission, due to arrive in March, to assess threats to the World Heritage-listed reef marine park.

AAP also reports that in September, scientists from Queensland's Environment Department found traces of dangerous

pesticides – at up to 50 times the levels deemed safe in waterways – flowing onto the reef. Three chemicals, including diuron, exceeded national standards for contamination of freshwater ecosystems at eight sites along the Great Barrier Reef coast.

According to APVMA, the current suspension affects around two-thirds of the 101 diuron products currently registered in Australia. New use instructions are being issued for the suspension period, including additional restrictions designed to minimise run-off.

APVMA requests product registrants to inform all parts of their supply chains to ensure that all products contain the new instructions prior to sale.

Source: APVMA, AAP