

2014 Environmental Agents Inspection Results Released

On 2 March 2015, the EPA released the results of its 2014 inspections of environmental agents on the market. A total of 31,280 products were inspected, of which 379 had incorrect information on their labels, resulting in a pass rate of 98.79%. In addition, 131 products were also tested for active ingredients, all of which passed.

To ensure that environmental agents being sold are all legal, and to prevent environmental agents from unknown sources from harming public health and the environment, every year the EPA draws up an Environmental Agent Inspection Plan for local government environmental protection bureaus to administer. Inspections and testing are conducted at irregular intervals and focus upon dollar stores, flower markets, traditional wet markets, pesticide and herbicide stores, grocery stores and night markets. The inspectors look for incorrect labeling, counterfeit products, and banned environmental agents. Random ingredient testing is also conducted. In addition, to ensure that the public is not buying greenwashed products, the EPA has requested manufacturers of self-claimed “natural” insect-repelling environmental agents to send in samples of their products and submit ingredient certificates and proofs of efficacy to confirm the effectiveness of ingredients.

In 2014, the EPA also uncovered 27 unregistered environmental agents being sold in shops around Taiwan. Upon being tested, three of these products were found to contain Mirex, a chemical compound banned by the EPA and listed as a persistent organic pollutant under the Stockholm Convention. Vendors of 20 other products – which were claimed to be natural pesticides or insect repellants, but which had not been approved by the EPA – were also fined and given deadlines to remove the products from shelves.

To strengthen control over illicit environmental agents entering Taiwan from overseas, the EPA has been keeping in close contact with the Customs Administration of the Ministry of Finance to ensure that all the shipments of environmental agents carry a permit or other certification issued by the EPA when going through customs clearance. Unapproved shipments will be immediately confiscated, and the Customs Administration will pass on importers' details to the EPA, which will then instruct local government environmental protection bureaus to issue penalties. The EPA also releases news on illicit environmental agents every year, and urges the public to avoid buying online environmental agents from unknown sources.

The EPA is also consulting with owners of e-commerce platforms to strengthen controls by requiring that member vendors abide by the regulations forbidding the sale of illicit environmental agents. The platform owners have also modified their keyword search functions so that they are alerted to the sale of illicit environmental agents, and are better able to block such products from being displayed on their websites. The aforementioned measures constitute strong mechanisms that allow the EPA, local government environmental protection bureaus and customs officials to prevent illicit environmental agents from being sold in Taiwan.

The EPA is keen to emphasize that there are 731 types of general environmental agents that have been registered with the EPA. Gaining approval for these substances involves multiple checks and controls, and the EPA is urging the public not to turn their backs on these bona fide products by instead buying falsely-labeled products from untraceable sources. Consumers should always check the label of the environmental agent product that they are buying to ensure that it carries an EPA approval number.

The EPA has established an online environmental agent permit checking system at http://mdc.epa.gov.tw/MDC/search/search_License.aspx, that allows consumers to type in the permit number on the label and immediately check whether or not a product is legally registered with the EPA. The system can also be used to identify which insect repellent products use natural ingredients as well as legally registered environmental agent vendors and disease vector control enterprises. The EPA has also established a website, <http://mdc.epa.gov.tw/EVagents/EVSecurity/EVIndex.aspx>, to provide guidance on recognizing common household pests, along with principles for selecting and safely using environmental agents.