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Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

2105 First Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404 USA

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Jackie Hunt Christensen, 612-870-3424 or 612-387-3424

Governor Signs Into Law Restrictions on Arsenic in Fertilizer New Law May Ban Several Popular Fertilizers Including Ironite

Minneapolis - The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) applauded the Minnesota Legislature and Governor Tim Pawlenty for signing into law last week a bill which would restrict the sale of fertilizer products in Minnesota to those with less than 500 parts per million of arsenic.

The law, introduced by State Representative Dan Dorman (R-Albert Lea) and Senator Scott Dibble (D-Minneapolis) will likely restrict the sale of a popular fertilizer, Ironite, which is composed of mining waste and contains arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury. Ironite can be found in many gardening stores throughout the state. Arsenic is a known carcinogen, and even small amounts of lead or mercury can damage a child's ability to learn. Testing of Ironite by state agencies in Washington and Minnesota have found levels ranging from 3540 to 6020 parts per million of arsenic, and 3400 to 4380 parts per million lead.

In Minnesota, as in most other states, fertilizer makers are required only to disclose the plant *nutrients* on the product label. Since arsenic, lead and mercury provide no benefit to plants, they are not listed on the label.

"This law is a great step in the right direction toward cleaning up recycled hazardous waste posing as fertilizer," said Jackie Hunt Christensen, co-director of IATP's Food and Health Program. "The next step is for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to require all fertilizer ingredients be labeled so that consumers can decide whether they want arsenic, lead or mercury in their garden."

Fertilizer products become contaminated when manufacturers buy toxic waste from industrial facilities to obtain low-cost plant nutrients, such as zinc or iron. Such industrial wastes are often highly contaminated with heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium chromium, lead and mercury; and dioxins. These substances are known or suspected to cause cancer, reproductive harm, neurological damage, and a variety of other dangerous health effects, including kidney and liver damage, skin irritation, and gastrointestinal ailments.

Because of weak federal laws and requirements for the use of hazardous waste in fertilizer under the 1986 Bevill exemption to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, several states have begun to act on their own to protect and better inform consumers.

In 1998, Washington state required fertilizer vendors to disclose to the public whether their product is waste-derived, and to file a total-metals analysis for nine heavy metals each year when the product is registered with the state. The information on each product is available on the Internet because allegedly some products contain more elements than could be listed on the label. Washington has also set limits for those metals.

Read IATP's fact sheet on toxic fertilizer to find more details on common hazardous waste chemicals found in fertilizer – [Getting the Dirt on What's in Your Fertilizer](#)

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