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HB 3892 RELATING TO ROADSIDE HERBICIDE USE

House Committee on
Energy and Environmental Protection

Public Hearing - February 14, 1996
8:30 A.M., Room 312, State Capitol

By

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Jacquelin Miller, Environmental Center

HB 3892 would amend Chapter 264, HRS, to ban use of herbicides by state agencies in the maintenance of public roadways. Roadside spraying would be phased out over a period of three years.

Our testimony on this measure does not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Public concern over the use of herbicides to control weeds along Hawaii's roadsides has been voiced for many years. In response to HCR 254 H.D. 1 S.D. 1 enacted by the Sixteenth Legislature Regular Session of 1991, a Task Force was convened to "review state and county policies and procedures for roadside spraying..." The report of the Roadside Spraying Task Force was submitted to the Legislature which concluded,

[A]n integrated vegetation management (IVM) program for the State of Hawaii should be a viable and economically responsible option for the safe control of roadside weeds."

Concerns over the use of herbicides for roadside weed control generally relate to issues of human health risk and non-point source pollution. Thousands of pounds and tens of thousands of gallons of herbicide are applied annually along state roads. While the relative risk of public exposure to sprayed herbicides varies depending on the type and frequency of application, there is no question that banning herbicide use will remove a significant source of chemical runoff from Hawaii's highways. In addition, the aesthetic advantages of non-chemical roadside maintenance are self-evident.

Objections to banning herbicide spraying on roadsides have generally fallen into two categories: public safety and cost. Both of these objections were explored in the Task Force report, and their recommendations include an orderly transition and monitoring to optimize results of the IVM plan to be implemented in each region. In addition, many states have either banned or significantly reduced herbicide use, and their experiences offer valuable guidance for the development of effective non-chemical control methods locally. Thus, we strongly support the intent of this measure.