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Advocacy groups give up on pesticide panel

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Saying that the pesticide industry and agribusiness lobby had "hijacked the process" of taking meaningful action against dangerous pesticides, seven environmental, advocacy, and farmworkers groups resigned in protest last week from the Environmental Protection Agency's [Tolerance Reassessment Advisory Committee](#) (TRAC). The committee was established by Vice President Al Gore about a year ago to advise EPA on implementation of the 1996 [Food Quality Protection Act](#) (FQPA).

The resignations occurred just as TRAC was beginning a two-day meeting on policy developments and risk assessment. TRAC still has about 45 members--including representatives from industry and farming groups, academia, federal and state agencies, and companies, including [Dow AgroSciences](#), [Monsanto](#), and [American Cyanamid](#)--but no public interest groups remain.

According to Erik D. Olson, a senior attorney for the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) (NRDC)--one of the members who resigned--the TRAC process has "tied EPA in knots." The groups say EPA's limited financial and human resources are being diverted from reassessing one-third of all pesticide tolerances by August 1999--as required by FQPA--and directed toward trying to elicit consensus of all TRAC members. TRAC was to have held only four public meetings and to have completed its process by September 1998, but several additional meetings have been required.

In a letter to EPA Deputy Administrator Peter D. Robertson and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Richard E. Rominger, TRAC's cochairmen, the groups write: "This process has been marked by an endless, fruitless airing of stakeholder opinion about pesticide science and policy. . . . EPA's failure to reach decisions under FQPA . . . will only benefit those who profit from the status quo."

"Lack of action has essentially stalled the transition to safer and more sustainable pest management practices," said Edward Groth, technical director of [Consumers Union](#), another group that resigned, at a press conference.

In a response, EPA's Robertson stressed that the agency is committed to FQPA. "We, too, wish that this process could be faster," he said, but EPA is on schedule for assessing risks and taking risk-reduction actions.

At the TRAC meeting, several members expressed disappointment over the resignations and said they hoped the groups would return for TRAC's final meeting in September. TRAC member Jay J. Vroom, president of the [American Crop Protection Association](#), an industry group, says if the groups do not come back, the process will go forward without them, leaving EPA to make guesses about what they might want. The groups, he says, have placed themselves at a disadvantage by no longer being directly involved in the decision-making process.

Other groups opting out of TRAC include the [World Wildlife Fund](#), the [Pesticide Education Center](#), and the National Campaign for Pesticide Policy Reform. The Environmental Working Group resigned from TRAC last October, for similar reasons.

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