



Syngenta pays \$105 million to settle herbicide lawsuit

JIM SUHR • ASSOCIATED PRESS | Posted: Friday, May 25, 2012 10:48 am

EAST ST. LOUIS• Swiss chemicals maker Syngenta's agreement to pay \$105 million to settle a nearly 8-year-old lawsuit over one of its popular agricultural herbicides could help reimburse nearly 2,000 community water systems that have had to filter the chemical from its drinking water, a plaintiffs' attorneys said today.

The proposed deal, announced Friday by Syngenta, must be approved by a federal judge in southern Illinois, where community water systems from at least a half-dozen states have sought to have the company reimburse them for filtering weed-killing atrazine from their supplies.

As part of the deal, some 1,887 community water systems serving more than 52 million Americans may be eligible to make a claim, said Stephen Tillery, the St. Louis attorney behind the class-action lawsuit.

Syngenta said it agreed to settle the matter "to end the business uncertainty" and avoid further legal costs. Under the settlement, the company will continue to sell atrazine to U.S. corn growers and denies any liability linked to the chemical, which Syngenta said is used in more than 60 countries and has been marketed in the U.S. since 1959.

"This settlement is good for Syngenta and the farmers who depend on atrazine, as well as Syngenta's retailers, distributors, partners, and others who have been inconvenienced by this ongoing and burdensome litigation for almost eight years," Syngenta said.

Research has shown runoff after rainstorms can wash the chemical — used for decades to kill grasses and broadleaf weeds — into streams and rivers, where it can enter drinking water supplies. The lawsuit claimed atrazine in drinking water can cause low birth weights, birth defects and reproductive problems, though the company has argued no one ever has or ever could be exposed to enough atrazine in water to affect their health.

The amounts eligible water systems may recover will depend upon the levels and frequency of atrazine contamination they experienced, as well as the population served by each of them, Tillery said. Some 300 water systems with the highest contamination levels will be reimbursed all of their costs, he said.

"The scope of this historic settlement is enormous and its protection of the health of millions of Americans across the country is a huge benefit to the public, the environment and the taxpayers," Tillery said.

Under the tentative deal, attorneys representing the water systems will share roughly \$34.9 million in fees.

No immediate hearing date was set on the settlement motion filed Thursday involving the federal lawsuit that includes water providers in Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Indiana, Iowa and Ohio.

Thursday's court filing by Syngenta and the water systems suing it called the federal lawsuit and related state ones in Illinois "extremely hard-fought, burdensome and expensive," involving more than 10 million pages of documents shared between both sides.