State Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom has failed to put into place stronger rules to protect the public and the environment from the drift of pesticides from cropdusters, a state pesticide commissioner said Tuesday.

The department’s director of pesticides and environmental programs drew up proposals for tighter regulations last fall, but they have not been put in place, said Helen Vinton, a citizen’s representative on the Advisory Commission on Pesticides.

The Department of Agriculture and Forestry dropped work on the revision after citizens called for stronger regulation of cropdusters, she said. Vinton said it appears Odom “has had opposition” from cropdusters, and “he has paid attention to that.”

“Commissioner Odom has not followed through on having a complete, fleshed-out draft of the proposed regulations,” Vinton said. Since the agency held a public hearing on the proposed rules in Alexandria last October, “nothing has been done” to improve regulation of cropdusters, she said.

John Impson, assistant agriculture commissioner over the department’s pesticide programs, said revision of the regulations has not been completed because employees responsible for that work left the agency.

“We have been working on this,” Impson said. “We’re revising them with the comments and recommendations that we received.”

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Gerald Theunissen, who represents the aerial applicators on the pesticide commission, said Tuesday that many of the proposals addressed at the meeting in Alexandria are already in regulations or are being voluntarily carried out by applicators.

“I think the people who are most concerned about drift are the applicators themselves,” said Theunissen, who was previously the president of the Louisiana Agricultural Aviation Association, which represents aerial applicators.

“We welcome regulations to decrease drift,” he said, and the applicators have “absolutely not” opposed stronger regulations, “as long as they are sensible.”

Melissa Thorme, a fellow at the Tulane University Environmental Law Clinic, said she too is waiting for the agency to propose new regulations on aerial application of pesticides. “It’s long past overdue,” she said.

Thorme also said she believes Odom, who faces an election this fall, is not implementing the regulations because of opposition from cropdusters. “It’s an election year and it’s a hot potato and he doesn’t want to deal with it,” she said.

Thorme said there are a series of practices allowed under current rules that must be changed, such as the use of children to hold flags in fields to help cropdusters know where they should spray.