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federal emergency
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Monday, June 2, 1980

BULLETIN #9 - "Volcanic Ash Advice to Berry Growers"

The ash fallout of May 25 has caused some plant damage according to Dr. Ralph Blyther, Plant Pathologist, Washington State University.

Plants affected included blueberries, cucumbers, tomatoes, potato, corn, lettuce and some annual bedding plants.

Strawberries have not been damaged although the ash covering them may be quite difficult to remove. Processors are accepting berries that have received ashfall. Currently, raspberries present less of a problem as the fruit has not yet developed on the plant. The affect on pollination will not be known until the fruit is forming. It is recommended that pickers wear masks while in any ash-laden fields.

Damage appears as spotting decay in most cases. Young blueberry leaves showed severe marginal interveinal decay and ressetting on the very young fruit. Reaction ranged from none in some varieties to quite severe in others.

High salt content of the ash probably is responsible for the damage. Ash samples analyzed at the Western Washington Research Station in Puyallup, Washington have indicated rather high soluble salts. In areas having damage, the ash has either fallen in a moist condition or the area received a very light rain following deposition. In areas where dry ash fell and has been removed by shaking, air blasts, or very thorough watering (either by rain or irrigation) there is no damage.

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Dr. Byther recommends that if the ash falls in a moist form or plants receive only a light rain, the ash should be immediately washed off by heavy watering. If the ash falls dry, shake off the ash and finish with a good wash. A dry film might be left but it would not cause any damage.