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## Lawsuit Asks EPA to End Use of Hazardous Pesticide in USA

Endosulfan already banned in the EU and 20 nations including Cambodia,  
the Philippines, and Tonga

San Francisco, California – Today, a broad coalition of farmworker, public health, and environmental groups filed a lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency to stop the continued use of a hazardous pesticide called endosulfan. The coalition is demanding action from EPA to protect children, farmworkers, and endangered species.

Endosulfan is an organochlorine, part of the same family of chemicals as DDT, which EPA banned in 1972. Like other organochlorine pesticides, endosulfan is persistent in the environment and poisons humans and wildlife both in agricultural areas and in regions far from where it was applied.

“This dangerous and antiquated pesticide should have been off the market years ago,” said Karl Tupper, a staff scientist with Pesticide Action Network. “The fact that EPA is still allowing the use of a chemical this harmful shows just how broken our regulatory system is.”

### **Health Impacts**

Acute poisoning from endosulfan can cause headaches, nausea, vomiting, convulsions, and in extreme cases, unconsciousness and even death. Studies have linked endosulfan to smaller testicles, lower sperm production, and an increase in the risk of miscarriages.

One glaring omission in the EPA’s decision was its failure to consider risks to children. A 2007, study found that children exposed to endosulfan in the first trimester of pregnancy had a significantly greater risk for developing autism spectrum disorders. It also poses risks to school children in agricultural communities where it has been detected at unsafe levels in the air. In addition, endosulfan has been found in food supplies, drinking water, and in the tissues and breast milk of pregnant mothers.

“EPA has failed to protect children and endangered species from endosulfan poisonings,” said Joshua Osborne-Klein, an attorney for Earthjustice who is representing the coalition. “We call on EPA to ban the use of endosulfan in the United States.”

## **Environmental Impacts**

Endosulfan is a potent environmental pollutant and is especially toxic to fish and other aquatic life. It also affects birds, bees, earthworms, and other beneficial insects. A recent federal study found that U.S. national parks from Texas to Alaska are contaminated with endosulfan in amounts that threaten ecosystems and wildlife in these protected environments.

Endosulfan travels such long distances that it has been found in Sierra Nevada lakes and on Mt. Everest. This persistent pesticide can also migrate to the Poles on wind and ocean currents where Arctic communities have documented contamination.

## **Lack of EPA Action Forces Advocates to Court**

EPA's own analysis of endosulfan confirmed that the pesticide poses severe risks to humans and only minimal benefits to growers.

"This dangerous pesticide puts farmworker communities at increased risk of severe health effects," said Shelley Davis, deputy director of Farmworker Justice. "These risks are unacceptable since even EPA acknowledges that safer alternatives to endosulfan are already in widespread use."

Earlier this year, more than 13,000 Americans concerned about these health and environmental risks signed a petition urging EPA to discontinue endosulfan use. More than 100 environmental and public health groups recently sent a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson outlining their concerns about endosulfan. Further, more than 50 international scientists, medical doctors, nurses, and other health professionals have urged EPA to take action, as have tribal governments and indigenous groups in the Arctic.

"When EPA doesn't consider how a hazardous pesticide could impact the health of children, it is breaking the law," said Mae Wu, health attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "EPA's approach to reviewing the safety of this chemical is not only flawed and dangerous - but also illegal. The full scope of endosulfan's health impacts needs to be a priority, not an afterthought."

With little response from the EPA, a coalition of health and environmental groups today took the issue to federal court.

## **Pesticide Already Banned Across the World**

The European Union and more than 20 other countries including Cambodia, the Philippines, and Tonga have already banned endosulfan. In addition, it has been nominated for inclusion in the Stockholm Convention, an international treaty that bans persistent chemicals from global use.

"The U.S. has fallen far behind the rest of the world in protecting its children from harmful toxins," said Pam Miller, Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. "We must act now to reduce the toxic imprint that endosulfan will leave on future generations. We are

particularly concerned that endosulfan is increasing in the Arctic and that northern ecosystems and Indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable.”

### **Still Widely Used in the USA**

According to EPA, approximately 1.38 million pounds of endosulfan were used annually in the United States as of 2002, the most recent year for which national usage data are available. Crops commonly treated with endosulfan include cotton, tomatoes, melons, squash, and tobacco.

“The science clearly shows that the use of this chemical puts the health of exposed farmworkers and children in agricultural communities at risk,” said Erik Nicholson of United Farm Workers. “There’s plenty of evidence and no need for more studies - we’re demanding that EPA take action now.”

The lawsuit was brought by Earthjustice and Farmworker Justice on behalf of: Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Beyond Pesticides, Center for Environmental Health, Farm Labor Organizing Committee (AFL-CIO), Natural Resources Defense Council, Pesticide Action Network North America, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United), United Farm Workers, and Teamsters Local 890.

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### **Background Materials**

Read the petition filed today

[http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal\\_docs/endosulfan-complaint-72408.pdf](http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal_docs/endosulfan-complaint-72408.pdf)

Letter to Stephen Johnson from scientists:

[http://docs.nrdc.org/health/hea\\_08051901A.pdf](http://docs.nrdc.org/health/hea_08051901A.pdf)

Letter to Stephen Johnson from environmental health advocates

<http://www.panna.org/files/NGOendosulfanLetter051908.pdf>

Letter to Stephen Johnson from Arctic tribes and indigenous groups:

<http://www.panna.org/files/toEPAfromIndigenousOrganizationsReEndosulfan20080519.pdf>

PAN North America webpage on endosulfan: <http://www.panna.org/campaigns/endosulfan>