

Syngenta's paraquat up for global review

May 3, 2013 by Chela Vazquez



Next week, governments from around the world will decide whether to put strict controls on Syngenta's highly toxic herbicide paraquat — or maintain the status quo.

This pesticide has long been [banned in its country of origin](#), Switzerland, and its use is highly restricted in most industrialized nations, including the U.S. Yet it continues to be sold indiscriminately in developing countries where farmers and workers often cannot read technical labels and are unable to protect themselves from the pesticide's harmful effects.

Next week's decision could change all of this, as delegates to the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent — a global treaty governing trade in toxic chemicals — meet in Geneva. In an open letter to these government officials, groups around the world insist on global controls on this acutely toxic herbicide that is hurting thousands of peasants and farmers in the developing world.

Prior informed consent

The [Rotterdam Convention](#) dictates that countries be informed before importing toxic chemicals that have been banned in other countries. Countries can then take action and ban the import and use of the chemical, or impose strict restrictions.

[Paraquat](#) (and specifically the paraquat dichloride 20% formulation, also known as Gramoxone Super) was [proposed for inclusion](#) on the "Prior Informed Consent" list by Burkina Faso in 2011; this proposal will be considered — and a decision made — at next week's meeting of Rotterdam delegates in Geneva.

The open letter, signed by 89 organizations from 35 countries and led by PAN International and our partners at the [Berne Declaration](#), urges governments to rise to the occasion and take action on paraquat. It highlights the importance of the decision, especially in developing countries:

Paraquat is a highly hazardous herbicide, with no antidote, responsible for causing deaths and severe injuries to agricultural workers, farmers, and rural communities worldwide.

Many very poor people, especially in Asia and Latin America, have experienced [severe health harms](#),

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Published on Pesticide Action Network (<http://www.panna.org>)

and some die from [exposure to paraquat](#). The herbicide is used to kill weeds in oil [palm plantations](#), as well as in rubber, bananas, coffee, pineapples, rice, corn, and other crops.

Documented [health effects](#) of exposure to the chemical include Parkinson's disease, neurological disorders, endocrine disruption, and cancer.

Moneymaker for Syngenta

Paraquat is an important moneymaker for its creator and main manufacturer, the Swiss company Syngenta. Despite bans in many countries — including Switzerland — international policies allow [exports of this antiquated herbicide](#) for continued use in poor communities around the world.

Now is the time to bring this dangerous chemical under control. Governments must heed the clamor of workers, farmers, women and children around the world, and take action.

PAN International is asking that concerned citizens around the world call Ministries of Environment and Foreign Relations and ask them to say YES to the inclusion of paraquat dichloride 20% formulation in the Rotterdam Convention when governments meet next week.

Source URL: <http://www.panna.org/blog/syngentas-paraquat-global-review>