Industry shenanigans delay action on paraquat

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This week in Geneva, officials from countries around the world met to consider adding the herbicide paraquat to an international treaty on trade of toxic chemicals. Though there was widespread support for the move, two countries — Guatemala and India — managed to get the decision postponed for another two years.

Guatemala is a major exporter of paraquat formulations, and blatantly broke the rules of the Rotterdam Convention by having an industry representative negotiate on their behalf in Geneva. Though Guatemalan officials apologized — and the industry representative was expelled from the session — the damage was done.

PAN's senior scientist Dr. Emily Marquez is on the ground in Geneva, and reports that PAN International participants at the meeting played a critical role in flagging the inappropriate role of the Guatemalan industry representative. Under strict treaty procedures, observers — whether industry or non-governmental — can comment on the proceedings but are prohibited from playing any role in official negotiations.

Action on paraquat already overdue

PAN partners around the world have been pressing hard for action on paraquat, and had been pleased that the delegates seemed poised to require "informed consent" on the part of importing countries. The interference from Guatemala and India means that action is once again delayed. As Dr. Marquez said:

> "It's truly disappointing that even after the recommendations of the chemical review committee — which eliminated any doubt about whether paraquat deserved to be listed — that a decision on listing paraquat will be put off for another two years."

The objective of the Rotterdam Convention is to share information and to allow importing countries the possibility to give prior informed consent before the import of hazardous chemicals listed under the treaty.

Paraquat is already prohibited in more than 40 countries around the world, including the home country of its primary manufacturer, Syngenta. In a joint statement from PAN International, IPEN, the Berne Declaration and the International Union of Food Workers, scientist Dr. Meriel Watts explained the dangers of the herbicide:

> "Paraquat is one of the world's worst herbicides. A teaspoon of paraquat is enough to kill a person, and there is no antidote. Farmers all over the world suffer from skin burns, blindness and respiratory damage as a result of using paraquat."

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