

End game for endosulfan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts:

Karl Tupper, PANNA, 415-981-6205, ext 314

Kristin Schafer, PANNA, 408-836-8189 (cell)

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Environmental health and farmworker groups celebrate U.S. phaseout of persistent pesticide

Today Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA) and partners around the world are rejoicing over U.S. EPA's announcement of the end of endosulfan, an antiquated, highly toxic insecticide. The pesticide has been linked to autism, birth defects, and delayed puberty in humans.

"This decision is a long overdue victory for the farmworkers who have worked with this poison, the families that live near fields where it's sprayed, and the Indigenous communities in the Arctic who are exposed to it in their traditional foods," said Karl Tupper, Staff Scientist with PANNA. "Our work has finally paid off."

PANNA and allies have campaigned for a ban on endosulfan for years, collecting tens of thousands of signatures on petitions to EPA, filing legal petitions, submitting detailed comment letters, and challenging in federal court the agency's 2002 decision to reregister endosulfan.

Citing concerns over human health and environmental degradation, EPA is negotiating an agreement from its manufacturer, Makhteshim Agan North America, to voluntarily remove endosulfan products from the market.

"The end of endosulfan cannot come soon enough for farmworkers," says Jeannie Economos, Pesticide Safety and Environmental Health Project Coordinator with the Farmworker Association of Florida. "The health of farmworkers should have raised red flags on the impacts of this pesticide many years ago. Soil and water studies in and around the Everglades indicate that endosulfan is also of serious concern to wildlife."

Today's announcement is expected to have reverberations outside the U.S. as well. Already banned in more than 60 countries around the world, including Thailand, Sri Lanka, several African countries and all 27 members of European Union, a global ban on endosulfan is currently being pursued under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, a UN treaty.

"The U.S. EPA is taking the lead in the right direction with its decision to phase out endosulfan," says Sarojeni V. Rengam of Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific. "We hope this decision will increase momentum towards a worldwide ban that is effectively implemented by governments. The unhealthy legacy of this acutely toxic chemical has been felt for decades by farmers and rural communities in Asia and throughout the world. It is time for endosulfan to go."

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Pamela Miller, Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics, agrees. "Endosulfan has become one of the most ubiquitous organochlorine pesticides in the Arctic, contaminating the traditional foods of Arctic Indigenous peoples, including fish, seabird eggs, and marine mammals. This is a serious public health and human rights issue. Unless it is phased out globally, levels are likely to increase with climate warming in the Arctic. We hope that the U.S. phase out will help advance a global ban."

The Stockholm Convention outlaws toxic chemicals that—like PCBs and DDT—persist in the environment, bioaccumulate in food chains, and are transported across international boundaries on the wind and in ocean currents. India and China have been the most vocal opponents to adding endosulfan to the treaty, and have pointed to its continued use in the U.S. as evidence that it must not be harmful.

According to Tupper, who participates in the Convention's negotiations, "Today's announcement takes away one the most powerful talking points of those few countries that are determined to stop a global ban."

Jayakumar Chelaton, Director of the Indian NGO Thanal, said, "We expect that India will be encouraged to act after hearing the decisions of the U.S. EPA to protect health and the environment, since Indian law makers have been referring to U.S. provisions when framing the Indian law. This is now the opportunity for all to stay ahead in saving the world and making it toxic free. "

Available for interviews:

Karl Tupper, Staff Scientist, Pesticide Action Network North America. (415) 981-6205, ext 314, karl@panna.org

Pamela Miller, Executive Director, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, (907) 222-7714, pkmiller@akaction.net

Jeanne Economos, Pesticide Safety and Environmental Health Project Coordinator, Farmworker Association of Florida, (407) 886-5151, farmworkerassoc@aol.com

Resources:

PANNA resource page on endosulfan:

<http://www.panna.org/campaigns/endosulfan>

EPA information on endosulfan

cancellation: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/reregistration/endosulfan/endosulfan-cancl-fs.html>

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