Endosulfan residues found in vegetables

The Sun Star

CAGAYAN DE ORO (November 13, 2008) -- Residues of the deadly endosulfan pesticide have been found in vegetables coming from Talakag town in Bukidnon province, the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA) in Northern Mindanao said Wednesday.

The vegetables, mostly cabbages and pechay, posed a major threat to Cagayan de Oro since these leafy vegetables are sold in the city’s markets.

Ma. Sonia Calleja, FPA regional director, said endosulfan residues were found on the vegetables that were randomly tested by their chemists.

She said they have sent samples of their findings to Manila for additional testing to determine its toxicity to humans.

The FPA started investigating the vegetables from the town of Talakag after the regional office of the Bureau of Plant Industry reported the matter to Department of Agriculture (DA)-Northern Mindanao Director Lealyn Ramos last October 28.

Ramos immediately ordered Calleja and her staff to investigate. Calleja said the investigation is still ongoing in the vegetable farms in Talakag.

Councilor Dante Pajo, chairman committee on health, urged the public to properly wash all leafy vegetables they bought from the city markets before cooking.

Pajo said consumers should wash the vegetables thoroughly in flowing water and not just submerge it on water.

Pesticide
Endosulfan is widely used in the control of a large variety of insects and mites in crops. Its use is banned in Europe but in the Philippines, big multinational companies, like Del Monte Philippines, use it in their banana and pineapple plantations.

The cream and brown-colored pesticide gained notoriety after 10 tons owned by Del Monte Philippines went down with M/V Princess of the Stars of Sulpicio Lines when it sank off Sibuyan Island last June 20.
According to the State of Queensland Health Fact Sheet (Australian Government) and the US Department of Health and Human Services - Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, endosulfan on crops usually breaks down in a few weeks.

The pesticide, however, sticks to soil particles and may take years to completely break down. Endosulfan also does not dissolve easily in water, according to the Australian and US agencies.

The Provincial Board (PB) of Bukidnon passed an ordinance banning the use of pesticide endosulfan or its derivates in plantations in Bukidnon last August 1.

Endosulfan affects the central nervous system and prevents it from working properly. Hyperactivity, nausea, dizziness, headache, or convulsions have been observed in adults exposed to high doses. Severe poisoning may result in death.

Studies on the effects of endosulfan on animals suggest that long-term exposure to endosulfan can also damage the kidneys, testes, and liver and may possibly affect the body's ability to fight infection.

Several studies have documented that endosulfan can affect human development. Researchers studying children from an isolated village in Kerala, India have linked endosulfan exposure to delays in sexual maturity among boys. Birth defects of the male reproductive system, including cryptorchidism, were also more prevalent in the study group.

A 2007 study by the California Department of Public Health found that women who lived near farm fields sprayed with endosulfan and the related organochloride pesticide dicofol, during the first eight weeks of pregnancy, are several times more likely to give birth to children with autism.

**Smuggled**

Calleja said the farmers in Talakag might have gotten the endosulfan they have used from traders who got their stocks from unscrupulous importers, who smuggle the pesticide from neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia.

She said importers smuggled through Zamboanga City and the unguarded southern backdoor of the country, and then sold the vegetables to traders in Cagayan de Oro, who in turn sold them to Bukidnon farmers.

Calleja said a similar case of endosulfan use on vegetables was discovered in the towns of Libona and San Fernando, Bukidnon last year.

She said the sale of the pesticide is prohibited in the Philippines, except those for Del Monte Philippines and Dole Philippines.
"I would like to clarify that the endosulfan used by Talakag farmers is not from Del Monte Philippines or Dole," Calleja told Sun.Star Cagayan de Oro. "We suspect that they were smuggled from Malaysia and Indonesia through Zamboanga City," she added.

Last July, Calleja told the Bukidnon PB inquiry on endosulfan that she would be happy if the pesticide will be banned in the province.

Use
Councilor Reynaldo Advincula, who is in vegetable trading, said all vegetables grown in Bukidnon are brought to the vegetable landing area in Agora public market in Barangay Lapasan, Cagayan de Oro City.

Advincula said traders like him sell the vegetables to Cebu and Manila. Vendors from Cagayan de Oro's public markets also get their vegetables at the vegetable landing area, he said.

He said endosulfan is widely popular among the farmers because it is very effective against pests that destroy vegetable crops, citing his experience as a vegetable farmer. Advincula admitted that he used endosulfan in his farm. He said endosulfan is a very effective pesticide.

(ALR/Sun.Star Cagayan de Oro/Sunnex)