

Over 100 fatal poisonings each year, Costa Rica

According to Fernando Ramírez Muñoz, agronomist in the field of Alternative Diagnostics, each year more than 100 poisonings occur because of inappropriate handling of pesticides, a very worrying situation. He added that there has been serious deficiency in implementing the national legislation. Even though Costa Rica has a series of decrees aimed at restricting and decreasing the use of highly toxic pesticides, these laws have failed to deliver their objectives.

Data from the Medicatura Forense show that the insecticide methomyl (Lannate) causes the highest number of fatal poisonings, followed by the herbicide paraquat (Gramoxone), with the nematicide terbufos (Counter) in third place. To try and reduce poisonings linked with the use of highly toxic pesticides, Costa Rica is holding an international forum to create awareness, share experiences and propose evidence-based actions to reduce use and therefore poisonings due to these pesticides.

He asserted that 'there is no control by the Ministry of Agriculture over which pesticides should be used and where'. 'In this country, paraquat is the herbicide which causes most fatalities and it is the most commonly used. There are people who even use it to kill grass, while in pineapple cultivation, high doses are used, between 10-15 litres per hectare, when the standard dose is one or two litres'.

Besides the fatal cases, acute poisonings are also extremely worrying. Despite the decrees which aim to restrict or eliminate the use of highly toxic pesticides, and the efforts of public agents such as NGOs and international forums, the powerful marketing of the agrochemical multinationals overrides health and environmental concerns in many cases. Ramírez also expressed concern over water contamination. Bromacyl is 'used in pineapple plantations, but filters through the soil and then passes into groundwater, used for drinking water. There is a fundamental right to have access to clean water' he concluded. He added that in the next few days a new decree would be published to avoid the use of endosulfan, currently used on rice.

Diego Arias, from the Department of Typology at the Medicatura Forense, stated that every year they receive over 200 cases to investigate for acute poisoning. In 2006, over half of these proved to be positive. 'During 2004 and 2005, poisoning cases remained static but increased in 2006, but now we have to wait and see what effect the new decrees will have'. (SW)

Krissia Morris Gray, Prensa Libre 12 March 2008, Costa Rica, <http://www.prensalibre.co.cr/2008/marzo/12/nacionales12.php>

200 fatal poisonings officially recorded in Nicaragua in 2007

In the first three weeks of 2008 39 cases of pesticide poisoning were registered in the country. In 2007, according to a report from the Ministry of Health's Centre for Toxicological Information, Surveillance, Support and Advice, 1,308 cases and 196 deaths were recorded, while the figures in 2006 were for 1,167 and 148 respectively. To address this dramatic situation, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health, along with the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry and Environment, are preparing a resolution to prohibit the pesticides responsible for the highest number of poisonings and completely restrict the sale of products which can cause fatal poisoning.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health will carry out numerous activities to reduce poisoning and fatalities linked to pesticides, including training for 320 medics on appropriate treatment for people admitted to emergency hospital departments and training for 22,000 end users in use and handling of pesticides, symptoms of poisoning and safety measures. According to the report, suicide attempts were the most common poisoning route in

2007, with 683 cases, representing 52.2% of total cases. The national suicide attempt rate was 12.21 per 100,000 inhabitants. The second most frequent route was occupational exposure, with 343 cases, 26.2% of cases. Actual suicide represented 15% (196 cases) of the total. Dr Jesús Marín from the Toxicology Centre explained that the Ministry is carrying out checks on pesticide controls at departmental level with the local intersector pesticide commissions, 'to improve safety, distribution and confiscation'.

He also referred to the latest poisonings in Jinotega, due to food contamination, 'finding street vendors who sold pesticide products without any form of licence, which then contaminated food. So these are being confiscated from all these itinerant vendors not only in Bocay but also in the SILAIS, which use the most pesticides'. (SW)

Nicaragua: 1,308 pesticide poisonings and 196 fatalities registered officially in 2007

Ministry of Health prepares resolution to ban those pesticides responsible for major poisonings
Press release from Ministry of Health, 9 Feb 2008

Nigeria bans 30 pesticides after rash of poisonings

THE Nigerian National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has banned the sale and supply of 30 different agrochemical products in the country.

NAFDAC Director-General, Professor Dora Akunyili, explained in Abuja that the ban became necessary when it was discovered that the pesticides were causing food poisoning that had resulted in the death of many after they consumed food crops preserved with the chemicals.

She said: 'many people in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State suffered from food poisoning due to ingestion of moi-moi and beans. A total of 112 people were hospitalised and the death of two children were recorded.'

'The moi-moi and beans from the homes of the victims and from open markets in Taraba and Benue states were collected for laboratory analysis which revealed outrageously high levels of organophosphate, carbamates, fenitrothion and chloropyrifos that are highly toxic pesticides.'

'Again, we got another report that over 120 students of Government Girls Secondary School, Doma, Gombe were rushed to Gombe Specialist Hospital after

consuming a meal of beans suspected to have been preserved with poisonous chemicals.'

'Samples were again taken to our laboratory and it was discovered that the food-stuffs contained outrageously high levels of lindane, an organochlorinated pesticide commonly called gammalin that affects the nervous system, producing a range of symptoms from nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness to seizure, convulsion and death,' she said.

As results of these incidents, NAFDAC said Nigerians should stop using agrochemicals that are not approved by the agency and should desist from the dangerous practice of using gammalin to harvest fish.

Some of the banned pesticides are aldrin, binapacryl, captafol, chlordane, chlordimeform, DDT, dieldrin, dinoseb, ethylene dichloride, heptaclor and lindane. Others are parathion, phosphamidon, monocrotophos, methamidophos, chlorobenzilate, toxaphene, endrin, merix endosulphan, delta HCH and ethylene oxide.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200805140264.html>

PAN UK – Making a difference

Pesticide Action Network UK works to eliminate the dangers of toxic pesticides, our exposure to them, and their presence in the environment where we live and work. Nationally and globally we promote safer alternatives, the production of healthy food and sustainable farming.

Pesticide Action Network UK is an independent, non-profit organisation. We work around the world with like-minded groups and individuals concerned with health, environment and development to:

- Eliminate the hazards of pesticides
- Reduce dependence on pesticides and prevent unnecessary expansion of use
- Increase the sustainable and ecological alternatives to chemical pest control

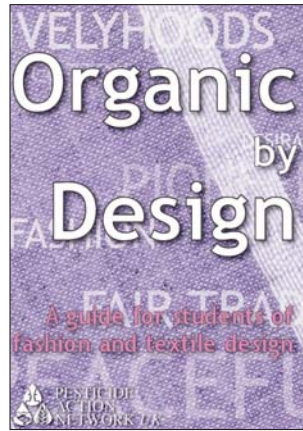
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- A Cotton Reader, 2007, Vol 1 99pp, vol 2 74pp, available at www.wearorganic.org; hard copies £10 per volume
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