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U.S. battles international ban on toxin used on utility poles that Health and Human Services calls a “carcinogen” & state lawmakers seek to eliminate in New York

(Rome) The U.S. government is opposing international efforts to halt the global use of a toxic chemical, pentachlorophenol (PCP), used in the U.S. on wood utility poles, at the same time as a bipartisan group of New York state lawmakers are seeking a state ban, and a lawsuit, filed by a group of Long Island residents, charges that hundreds of new PCP-treated utility poles are causing serious injury to health and property values. This month, the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services added PCP to its carcinogen list, saying that PCP is “reasonably anticipated to cause cancer”. The U.S. is the largest producer and user of PCP in the world.

The meeting to consider recommending a global ban on PCP will be held this week in Rome under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, an international treaty established to control highly hazardous chemicals. While most countries engaged in the process approve of the ban, the U.S. has consistently opposed it.

“Cancer-causing chemicals should not be leaking from utility poles into communities, playgrounds, and schools” said Pam Miller, Alaska Community Action on Toxics and IPEN. “It’s time for the U.S. to join the rest of the world in moving forward with a ban. PCP is ubiquitous in the breast milk of women throughout the world and in Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. The evidence more than justifies an international ban.

Approximately 1 million utility poles are treated with PCP each year. Soil samples taken near utility poles in Long Island showed concentrations of PCP more than 300 times New York’s permissible limits for poisonous substances. In a lawsuit filed earlier this year, residents charge that PCP is leaching from the poles into the surrounding soil. State lawmakers are now proposing a state law to ban PCP use on utility poles.

“The EPA has determined that contact with soil contaminated with PCP, as well as contact with treated wood products like utility poles poses an unacceptable cancer risk to children. It is irresponsible for the U.S. government to oppose this ban,” said Jay Feldman, Beyond Pesticides.

IPEN is an international network of more than 700 organizations in 116 developing countries. Its mission is a toxics free future for everyone.