

Greenwire- 2 May 2011

PESTICIDES: U.N. panel agrees to phase out endosulfan (05/02/2011)

Jeremy P. Jacobs, E&E reporter

A United Nations-backed coalition has voted to phase out the controversial pesticide endosulfan.

The ban was agreed to in Geneva last week at a gathering of the Stockholm Convention, a treaty regulating persistent organic pollutants.

Endosulfan is already banned or is being phased out in more than 80 countries, and environmental groups have long pushed for strict global standards on the pesticide, which is a known endocrine disruptor.

The ban will likely be particularly influential in India, which has resisted restrictions on the pesticide despite numerous reports of it having a significant health impact on the nation's farmers (*Greenwire* <http://www.eenews.net/Greenwire/2010/03/26/archive/22>), March 26, 2010).

"This is the moment we have been dreaming of," Jayan Chelaton of Thanal, an Indian advocacy group, said in a statement. "The tears of the mothers of the endosulfan victims cannot be remedied, but it will be a relief to them that there will not be any more people exposure to this toxic insecticide. ... We are happy to note that this is also a victory for poor farmers, as this proves people united from all over the world can get what they demand."

Endosulfan -- a neurotoxin from the same family of chemicals as DDT, the notorious pesticide banned by U.S. EPA in 1972 -- has been commonly used on fruit, vegetable and cotton crops. Animal testing has revealed significant effects on hormonal systems and also that the chemical may accumulate in human fat tissues.

The Stockholm Convention phaseout adds endosulfan to the United Nations' list of persistent organic pollutants (POPs). In most countries that have ratified the treaty, the ban will take effect in a year. For some crop-pest combinations, use of endosulfan will be phased out over the next six years.

The United States has signed the Stockholm Convention treaty but has not ratified it. EPA announced plans last year to begin phasing out U.S. use of the pesticide after the Stockholm Convention began its consideration of global limits (*E&ENews PM* <http://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2010/06/09/archive/6>), June 9, 2010).

Advocates from Arctic tribal areas have been particularly influential in lobbying for the ban, citing the chemical's ability to travel in winds and ocean currents. As a result of that, they say, the chemical has had a deep impact on tribal populations as well as polar bears.

Vi Waghiyi of Alaska Community Action on Toxics applauded the phaseout but added that the people she represents will continue to be at risk until the ban is enacted.

"Our people are some of the most contaminated on the planet," Waghiyi said in a statement. "But until all manufacturing and uses of endosulfan are eliminated, this pesticide will continue to harm our peoples, so we urge all countries to rapidly implement safer alternatives and eliminate their last few uses of endosulfan."

The Pesticide Action Network led the efforts against endosulfan, which was first submitted to the Stockholm Convention in 2007. Javier Souza, the coordinator for the group's Latin American arm, said the endosulfan phaseout should spur a broader consideration of pesticide use.

"This phase out," Souza said in a statement, "provides an excellent opportunity for countries to implement non-chemical alternatives to pesticides and to strengthen and expand agroecological practices."