

# Non-chemical alternatives for a safe environment for all



## Straw bale building – a viable alternative for Georgia and the EECCA region

WECF and its Georgian partners RCDA, SEMA and Greens Movement have launched a project aimed at reducing exposure to specific hazardous chemicals, namely asbestos, heavy metals, biocides and pesticides, in Georgia and increase awareness of relevant stakeholders.

The specific objective of the project is to create awareness of the negative impact of hazardous chemicals used in construction and agriculture and to promote the implementation of safer, preferably non chemical alternatives, especially for the following chemicals/materials: Hazardous substances used in insulation, heating, water supply, and housing materials (in particular asbestos, heavy metals in paints, piping), and pesticides and biocides in agriculture, home-use and municipalities.

### Hazardous construction and maintenance materials

A number of hazardous substances are used in the construction and maintenance of buildings in the EECCA region. WECF partner NGOs have long observed the use of those substances which are known to be hazardous to human health, like asbestos and lead-containing paints, but also PVC, chemically treated wood, flame retardants and various insulation materials, carpets, glues, etc. Asbestos and asbestos waste is a high risk especially for human health. The majority of the public is not informed about these dramatic health risks, thinking that the chrysotile asbestos made in the EECCA region is safe. The project demonstrates alternative, affordable ecological building. Straw bale building is introduced as an energy efficient and accessible and safe building technology. A straw bale conference hall was built at RCDA demonstration center.

### Pesticides and biocides in Georgia

The project addresses both pesticides (used on crops to reduce pests) and biocides (used on non crops, e.g. on animals and the house to reduce pests). WECF partners have surveyed which pesticides are regularly used in Georgian agriculture. Several of these are banned or severely restricted in the EU or worldwide. Many of the pesticides listed as used frequently in Georgia are known to have serious health and environmental impacts, like Organophosphorus, Triazoles or Pyrethroids. Such dangerous substances can be replaced by efficient alternatives such as pheromones and plant tinctures, which are available and increasingly used in

agriculture in the EU, and/or made redundant by using crop rotation, intercropping and applying the principles of sustainable agriculture. During the project, WECF and its local partners implement sustainable agriculture and integrate pest management methods in pilot demonstration fields with local farmers, in order to demonstrate how pesticide use can be substantially reduced. The project also published the first ever database on existing pesticides in Georgia in Georgian language. The handbook will present the basic principles on pesticides toxicity and safe use, and safe alternatives of hazardous pesticides. For each in Georgia, registered pesticide information is given on its chemical formula, CAS, IUPAC numbers, physical and chemical properties, preventive and first aid measures, etc. It is intended for practitioners, agricultural workers, toxicologists, health physicians, teachers and students of universities, scientists and others.

WECF's goal is to inform the decision makers, multipliers, and the public and demonstrate safer alternatives for the safe management of pests in the house and in agriculture, and the use of safe building and maintenance materials.

### The results

The project documents the current state of practices on the use of hazardous substances in construction and agriculture in Georgia. The project also introduces practical alternatives, develops training modules in Georgian and Russian together with training kits, and produced two educational brochures about alternatives. By introducing practical alternatives via publications and a high-level conference to various stakeholders from government, business, agriculture, and civil society, WECF provides best practice examples for developing construction and agriculture in a healthier and more sustainable way. **The highlights of the project are the pilot demonstrations of safe and healthy alternatives, like the straw bale building and the sustainable farming fields, and the first ever Georgian handbook and database on existing pesticides in Georgia.** In addition, these practical pilots provide feedback for policy recommendations at national level. The results are going to be shared with the wider WECF network and received high recognition on national and international level.

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**For more information please contact:** [anna.samwel@wecf.eu](mailto:anna.samwel@wecf.eu)



## Baltic info campaign on hazardous substances



Many products used in every day life, like toys, cosmetics, plastic products, etc. contain hazardous chemicals. In the Baltic States people are often not aware of this and sufficient regulation is not in place. People need to know about the substances in their products and related health effects, to have a chance avoiding them if they wish to do so.

The overall goal of the project is to initiate a stronger demand at the society in the three Baltic States for products free of hazardous substances via awareness raising activities, by influence the consumers behavior at pilot stakeholder groups and address policy makers.

The project partners Baltic Environmental Forum Estonia (BEF EE), Baltic Environmental Forum Latvia (BEF LV), Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania (BEF LT), WECF, Environmental Film Studio (VFS), Tallinn University (TLU), Liepaja University (LiePU), Rautakesko AS Estonia (Rautakesko EE) aim to raise awareness about which substances are considered at European Union (EU) and national level as hazardous, why so, in which products on the market they occur and where such products are used in everyday life.



The main project activities are: publication of easy understandable information materials, social media and interactive such as interactive games, web competitions etc. containing practical advice on possible individual reduction measures of hazardous substances, all targeted to the information needs of the particular stakeholder group; cooperation with educational institutions aiming to integrate the information on hazardous substances to school programmes; media workshops; trainings for Baltic NGOs to take more active part at relevant Baltic, EU and international fora.

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**For more information please contact:** [johanna.hausmann@wecf.eu](mailto:johanna.hausmann@wecf.eu), [Inese.Puzule@bef.lv](mailto:Inese.Puzule@bef.lv)

## Hazardous chemicals in products in the Balkans



In the Western Balkans many day-to-day products, like toys, contain hazardous chemicals, and neither there is decent information for consumers nor sufficient regulation in place.

The aim of the project is to identify the needs and address the lack of information of consumers, politics and the economy on the topic of chemicals in products, introduce the EU acquis in the area of product and chemical safety, and develop best practices that will improve the protection of human health and the environment.

The project partners are Baltic Environmental Forum, Women's Movement for Integral Development, Journalists for Women and Children Rights and Environmental Justice, Resource Center Leskovac, covering activities in Albania, Macedonia and Serbia.

The main project activities are: High-Level Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility for the Balkan Region in the area of consumer products like toys taking place in Serbia, information material, national round-tables and workshops for the public, stakeholders and media, publish national inventories, develop policy recommendations and present them online and at national and international events. So far the project gained huge media attention, and e.g. a safe toys network and new regulation on toys in Albania was introduced.



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**For more information please contact:** [bistra.mihaylova@wecf.eu](mailto:bistra.mihaylova@wecf.eu)

