

IUF

Uniting Food, Farm and Hotel Workers World-Wide

Workers Memorial Day 2008 – ban Endosulfan and save lives

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Every year thousands of agricultural workers and small farmers are killed by pesticides; millions more are made ill.

To commemorate Workers Memorial Day, April 28, 2008, IUF is joining forces with Pesticides Action Network (PAN) and the Environmental Justice Foundation to target endosulfan.

Endosulfan is primarily used to kill insects and mites on crops including tea, coffee, cotton, fruits, vegetables, soya, rice and grains. It is one of the most widely-used cotton pesticides, and is applied to cotton grown in 28 countries. In India, home to the world's largest cotton farming community, over 3,000 tonnes is applied to crops annually.

Why is it a problem?

Many cases of poisoning, including fatalities, have been reported - in Benin, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Turkey, and USA. It is one of the main causative agents of acute poisoning in Central America, in southern India and other areas.

Endosulfan has caused congenital birth defects, reproductive health problems, cancers, loss of immunity, neurological and neurobehavioural problems amongst villagers in Kerala (India) who were exposed to 26 years of aerial endosulfan spraying on neighbouring cashew nut plantations. Endosulfan may be the most important source of fatal poisoning among West Africa's cotton farmers. In Benin's cotton industry, endosulfan caused 400 accidental poisonings, including 53 deaths, between 2000 and 2003 - 69% of all pesticide poisonings. In a single province in Benin, at least 37 people died from endosulfan poisoning in just one season.

Endosulfan is acutely toxic and is readily absorbed by the stomach and lungs and through the skin. Symptoms of acute exposure include central nervous system disorders such as dizziness, vomiting, diarrhoea, breathing difficulties, convulsions, and loss of consciousness. In severe cases, death can result. Long term exposure has been linked to kidney and liver damage and to damage to the developing foetus.

In 2007, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) warned that "Occupational assessment for endosulfan indicates short- and intermediate-term risks for mixers, loaders, and applicators for the majority of uses, even with maximum Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and engineering controls." According to PAN International "Effects in survivors include congenital deformities, delayed male sexual maturity, female hormonal disorders, congenital mental retardation, cerebral palsy, psychiatric disturbances, epilepsy, cancers, skin, eye, ear, nose and throat problems, impaired memory, and chronic malaise".

Action plan

2008 year presents two key opportunities to engage the international community in placing greater restrictions on the sale, distribution and use of endosulfan.

From October 13-17, 2008 the POPs Review Committee will be meeting in Geneva to assess the potential to include endosulfan under the Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. An affirmative

response from the Review Committee would trigger consideration at the political level leading to the potential global elimination of endosulfan in 2009.

Following this, from October 27-31, 2008 the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention (PIC CoP4) will convene in Rome to decide on the inclusion of endosulfan in Annex III. This represents an unprecedented opportunity to press the international community to impose greater safeguards on the sale and distribution of endosulfan.

The IUF is calling on affiliates to:

- lobby their government ministers to support adopting endosulfan into the Conventions;
- help compiling evidence to assist in the campaign by sending any available documentary evidence on the negative health and environmental impacts of endosulfan for submission to the POPs Review Committee before 1 June 2008.