



**PRESS RELEASE - 14<sup>th</sup> January 2010**

## **Cancer-linked pesticides used in schools - New survey**

Children may be being exposed to at least four potentially cancer causing pesticides that are being used in UK schools, according to the findings of a new survey released today by the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Pesticides Action Network (PAN) (1).

The snapshot of English, Welsh and Scottish school authorities also revealed that 7 of the pesticides used in schools may have other serious negative health impacts (2). The survey also showed that 47% of local authorities who responded would like schools to go pesticide free.

Pesticides may play a role in several types of cancer - those affecting children including acute lymphocytic Leukaemia, brain cancer and others, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, breast cancer, prostate cancer and testicular cancer – all have been rising in incidence over more than three decades (3)

The Government is about to launch a consultation on its National Plans for pesticide use. This survey shows that these plans must include a ban on hazardous pesticide use in schools.

The HEAL survey of local authorities revealed:

- The pesticides being used include Dichlobenil – identified as possible cancer causing carcinogen; Oxadiazon classified as possible carcinogen and toxic to development; Sulfosulfuron, classified as likely to be carcinogenic, and the possible carcinogen mecoprop (4);
- A third of respondents said they could not give details of pesticides used in their schools;
- Only a third of schools and pupils were warned when pesticides were being used in schools or nearby by farmers or contractors;
- More than half of the respondents to the survey wanted to know more about pesticide residues in school food; and
- 36% wanted their food tested for residues.

[NOTE TO EDITORS: Full survey results will be available at [http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/UK\\_survey\\_final\\_report\\_140110.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/UK_survey_final_report_140110.pdf) ]

Removing the risk of cancer to school-aged children, who are uniquely vulnerable while their organs are growing, must be a high priority. Some suggested alternatives could be costly but one survey respondent proposes how this could be done:

*"..... With budgets as they are [huge reductions in the amount of pesticides used around school] seems as good an alternative as there is along with schools learning to "live with their weeds" a bit."*

In North America, many schools are already pesticide free. In the UK, the Food For Life programme and Garden Organic Schools work has resulted in hundreds of schools reducing pesticide exposure for their pupils. (5).

HEAL is proposing that Local authorities protect children by implementing a ban on pesticide spraying in schools and school grounds in 2010, and that the UK government's pesticide National Action Plans (6)- due for public consultation in January, include:

- Setting an early date for the phase out of the use of all pesticides in school grounds and playing fields as part of the UK National Action Plan on pesticide use.
- Requiring local authorities and independent school bodies to collate information on pesticide use in schools and on areas used regularly by schools, such as parks and sports utilities;
- Providing resources for authorities to use alternatives to pesticides.

HEAL and PAN also recommend that the UK Government support the phase out of all potentially carcinogenic and other hazardous pesticides (at EU level) by 2012 and that school authorities be given the budgets and advice to access pesticide free, organic food options where available.

The survey also highlights the need for more action to protect children from the effect of biocides, such as rat and cockroach poisons, since hazardous biocides were being used in schools (Bromadiolone is classified as extremely hazardous, and Aluminium Phosphide as highly toxic.). The current revision of the EU Biocides Law needs to be strengthened to protect health, monitor use, and ensure effective information for the public. (7)

Vicki Hird, HEAL Sick of Pesticides Campaigner says,

*"This is a hidden menace – carcinogens may be used where children play and learn, as this survey reveals. But it is an avoidable menace - so here's the New Year's resolution for local authorities – pesticide free schools. And the UK government must move quickly to eliminate the possible carcinogens from schools and help local authorities go pesticide free in their buildings grounds and in the food they serve to children."*

Nick Mole of Pesticides Action Networks says,

*"New legislation requires European Member States to reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides in areas frequented by vulnerable groups such as children. This should be a priority for the UK Government. It does not need to be expensive or difficult but would help to reduce children's exposure to toxic chemicals."*

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## Notes

1. The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), an international non-governmental organisation based in Brussels, is working to encourage wider public involvement on pesticide policy. In November 2008, HEAL launched the *Sick of Pesticides* campaign in the UK to raise awareness of the links between pesticides and cancer and put pressure on Governments to set up an ambitious National Action Plan for Pesticide Reduction. See [www.pesticidescancer.eu](http://www.pesticidescancer.eu) and on Facebook [www.facebook.com/pages/Sick-of-Pesticides/38411248553](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sick-of-Pesticides/38411248553). PAN is working 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, PAN UK promotes safer alternatives, the production of healthy food, and sustainable farming. [www.pan-uk.org](http://www.pan-uk.org)
2. Advanced copies of the full report can be sent. This gives the results from 30 authorities and details the pesticides being used by the local authorities which provided detailed information.[will be on [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org)]. The summary:

“Children are uniquely vulnerable to adverse health effects from exposure to pesticides and biocides. The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), undertook desk and industry research to identify possible pesticides and biocides being used or present in the school environment and school food. The results prompted HEAL to survey all 206 Local Authority education departments in England Scotland and Wales on the pesticides they use in schools and their attitude to pesticide use and pesticide residues. 15% of authorities provided usable responses. 57% of these provided details of pesticides used. These included 4 possible or probable carcinogens, and 7 pesticides with serious health associations. 47% of respondents wanted to go pesticide free. 36% wanted their school food tested for residues and 60% wanted more information about pesticides in school food. Some school described ways they were using fewer pesticides to tackle weeds and pests but several indicated that alternatives were unavailable or too costly. HEAL proposes that local authorities should voluntarily stop use of any hazardous pesticides and biocides and that the UK government should include, in its forthcoming National Action Plans on pesticides, measures to ban hazardous pesticides in schools and parks/play areas and provide support and finance for alternative approaches.”
3. See details in the Schools and Pesticides Briefing [http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Schools\\_Pesticidesbriefing\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Schools_Pesticidesbriefing_FINAL.pdf) For further information see Cancer Prevention & Education Society at <http://www.cancerpreventionsociety.org/facts.htm>
4. Pesticides are classed according to the limits of existing data and according to their acute toxicity, carcinogenicity, or their potential to disrupt hormone systems. The US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) had classified at least 72 pesticides as known, likely, probable or possible human carcinogens. That list is growing all the time as more detailed studies are carried out. See [http://www.pan-uk.org/PDFs/List%20of%20Lists\\_2009.pdf](http://www.pan-uk.org/PDFs/List%20of%20Lists_2009.pdf). This list cites potential pesticide carcinogens from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the European Union (EU) found in public documents.
5. **California Safe Schools** pesticide policy ([www.thedailygreen.com](http://www.thedailygreen.com)). **California Safe Schools** (CSS) - this non-profit coalition of over 50 organizations is internationally recognized for spearheading the most stringent pesticide policy in the nation at Los Angeles Unified School District. This ‘Integrated Pest Management Policy’ (IPM) uses low risk methods to eliminate pest and weeds. The policy was the first in the United States to embrace the Precautionary Principle and Parents Right to Know about pesticides used on school campuses. There are 27 good practice case studies from the US at <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/schools/publications/IPMSuccessStories.pdf>. Two **Canadian** provinces have banned the sale and use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. ([www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca) and <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/land/pesticides/factsheets/fs-schools.pdf>). The **Canadian Cancer Society** is promoting bans on the cosmetic use of pesticides (lawns, gardens, schools and parks) as a precautionary approach to potentially carcinogenic exposures as a precautionary part of a wider cancer eradication strategy. **UK - Food For Life** - for details of schools work - <http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/case-studies/food-education-growing>; **Garden Organic Schools** – for details of schools involved see [http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/schools\\_organic\\_network/map/index.php](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/schools_organic_network/map/index.php)
6. A new package of European measures has been passed which includes an EU regulation on authorisation of ‘plant protection’ products, a directive on the sustainable use of pesticides, and an amended machinery directive. The UK Government is due to consult with the public this January on National Action Plans on Human Health which results from the Sustainable Use Directive.
7. <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biocides/revision.htm>