



Nominated for the Public Eye Award 2005
in the category:

HUMAN RIGHTS

Nominated by: Berne Declaration, Switzerland

www.evb.ch/publiceyeondavos.htm

Syngenta International AG

Headquarters: Basel (resulting from the merger of the agriculture business sectors of Novartis and AstraZeneca in 2000)
Turnover/ net profit: 2003: US\$6.6 billion / US\$363 million
Branch of trade: Agribusiness, worldwide leading in pesticides and third place for commercial seeds
Number of employees: 2003: 19'061
CEO: Michael Pragnell
WEF member: YES (January 2004)

Outline

The use of Syngenta's pesticide paraquat particularly in developing countries leads often to serious health impairment with sometimes lethal consequences. The Berne Declaration and other NGOs therefore demand that the production of paraquat be stopped.

General Information on the Case

Syngenta's pesticide paraquat (trade name Gramoxone) is used in the cultivation of corn, soybeans, bananas, cocoa, coffee, etc. In case of frequent contact with or inappropriate handling of paraquat, injuries to lungs, skin, eyes, nose, as well as finger and toe nails may result. In addition, retarded consequences such as Parkinson's disease or skin cancer are suspected. The high toxicity of this pesticide leads to fatal accidents. It is therefore prohibited in several countries, or admitted under severe restrictions only.

Impairment of health and environment caused by the application of pesticides is greater in developing countries because adequate instruction of the operators as well as safety clothing are often lacking. For example, according to government data, in Malaysia most cases of poisoning in previous years were due to pesticides, mainly to paraquat. About 45 percent of all lethal cases of pesticide poisoning in Malaysia occur among farm and plantation workers. In 2002 the government prohibited the use of paraquat

In Costa Rica, hundreds of accidents with paraquat occur every year, most of them on the banana plantations of the Atlantic region. A study published in 2002 by the Pan-American Health Organization shows that for cases of pesticide poisoning in Costa Rica, paraquat is leading the sad statistics with a share of 19.5 percent. For lethal cases, the part of paraquat makes up 77 percent.

The paraquat advertising campaign run by Syngenta in Thailand in 2004 is yet another case. This campaign clearly violated the FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of

Pesticides. The poster showed a Gramoxone container and in front of it a large sport-utility vehicle (SUV) as well as a great number of motorbikes. Prizes could be won with a little bit of luck in the lottery by anyone who bought a bottle of Gramoxone. The FAO Code of Conduct rules “advertisements and promotional activities should not include inappropriate incentives or gifts to encourage the purchase of pesticides”.

The corporation is also accused of exerting pressure on scientists. One example is Tyrone B. Hayes, professor of biology at the University of California, Berkeley. He was doing research for Syngenta on the possible risks of the herbicide atrazine. In the process, he noticed alarming abnormalities in the test frogs. According to the Wall Street Journal Europe, the results were confirmed in repetitions of the tests. Syngenta in the following prevented a publication of the results. By means of aggressive lobbying, the corporate group achieved the readmission of atrazine in the US. The herbicide is prohibited in the EU, but it is still sold in many other countries. Syngenta is also criticized for the production and sale of genetically modified organisms and for cases of child labour in India.

Characteristics of Irresponsible Corporate Behaviour

- production and distribution of hazardous products detrimental to health
- unethical advertising
- pressure on scientists

Consequences

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), three million acute cases of pesticide poisoning occur annually, 200,000 of which end fatally. Case studies such as the one in Costa Rica indicate that paraquat is responsible for a large part of these pesticide casualties.

Current Status and Demands

The Berne Declaration and other NGOs request Syngenta as the principal producer and other producing companies to stop the production of paraquat. In addition, they ask of the international community of states the complete implementation of the Rotterdam Convention (imports of chemicals need to be approved by the receiving country), of the Stockholm Convention (protection from persistent organic pollutants) and of the FAO Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides .

Link to the details of the nomination: www.evb.ch/nominierungen.htm

Further information and links.

- www.evb.ch/kampagne.cfm?folder_id=93
- Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific: www.panap.net
- Pesticide Action Network UK: www.pan-uk.org