

PRESS RELEASE

Action on pesticides needed now

UK Pesticides Campaigner says that the Government has to take action over pesticides, as new comprehensive pesticides review from Canada confirms dangers

A prominent pesticides campaigner, who has conducted a determined campaign to change Government policy regarding agricultural spraying, says the Government cannot continue to ignore the evidence of the damage that pesticides are causing.

Georgina Downs' campaign to highlight the inherent health risks and devastating effects of pesticide use in rural Britain resulted in the launch of 2 UK Consultations' on crop-spraying on July 21st 2003, the result of which will be announced shortly by DEFRA.

Ms. Downs says *"Throughout the Consultation process DEFRA continued to maintain that pesticides are safe and that there is no risk to people in the countryside from crop-spraying, despite there being no evidence to support this claim and a considerable amount of evidence to the contrary."*

Ms Downs continues to receive emails and letters from people all over the country reporting clusters of acute and chronic long-term illnesses and diseases in communities surrounded by sprayed fields. She recently produced a "hard-hitting" video featuring a number of these cases to show the Government the reality of exactly what is happening in the countryside from the continued use of pesticides and other hazardous chemicals in agriculture. The most common illnesses reported include clusters of various cancers, leukaemia, asthma, ME, along with many other medical conditions. Reports of this nature have gone on for decades.

Ms. Downs points out that the most comprehensive review ever done in Canada on the chronic effects of pesticide exposure at home, in the garden and at work has just been released by the Ontario College of Family Physicians.

The college conducted a 14-month review of over 250 in-depth studies around the world on the effects of pesticides and found consistent evidence linking pesticide exposure to brain, kidney, prostate and pancreatic cancer as well as leukaemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, neurological damage, Parkinson's disease and other serious illnesses and diseases.

It states that pesticides may also be associated with adverse reproductive effects including birth defects, fetal death and intrauterine growth retardation.

The review found that children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pesticide exposure and identified increased risks for a number of illnesses and diseases, including kidney cancer and acute leukaemia.

Margaret Sanborn of McMaster University says that *"Our review does not support the idea that some pesticides are safer than others; it simply points to different health effects for different classes of pesticides."*

The college's overall message to patients is to avoid exposure to all pesticides whenever and wherever possible.

Ms. Downs points out that it is impossible for people living or working in agricultural areas to avoid exposure to pesticides, unless the Government take immediate action to ban crop-spraying near homes, schools, workplaces and any other places of human habitation.

Ms. Downs says, *"The Government cannot continue to maintain that this is not a public health problem as there is more than enough evidence to show that pesticides are associated with all sorts of acute and chronic illnesses and diseases. Therefore allowing this situation to continue is completely unacceptable and cannot be justified on any grounds. In my opinion the Government have continued to ignore the evidence of what is happening in reality due to massive legal implications, but the legal implications of continuing to ignore the evidence are probably far greater."*

Notes to Editors:

- Pesticides are poisonous chemicals and are inherently hazardous to human health
- The Ontario College of Family Physicians press release can be found at: <http://www.ocfp.on.ca/local/files/Communications/Current%20Issues/Pesticides/News%20Release.pdf>

The review paper itself can be found at:

<http://www.ocfp.on.ca/local/files/Communications/Current%20Issues/Pesticides/Final%20Paper%2023APR2004.pdf>

- The principle aim of pesticide regulation in the UK is supposed to be the protection of public health
- There is currently no legal obligation for farmers to notify anyone of any intended spraying application or to supply information on the chemicals being used, regardless of whether adverse health effects have been suffered
- At the present time a crop-sprayer is legally allowed to repeatedly spray mixtures of poisonous chemicals right up to the open window of any occupied premises whether it be a resident's home, a school (nursery, infant, primary etc.) a home for the elderly or disabled or any office or workplace
- In written PQ number PQ2696 03/04 Alun Michael (DEFRA Minister for Rural Affairs) has stated that *"The UK's pesticide approval system provides robust safeguards to protect the public against health risks - a view that is endorsed by independent scientists on the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. Before any pesticide can be used it must first be proved that it is safe to humans, wildlife and the environment. Companies wishing to obtain approval for the marketing and sale of pesticide products are required to submit substantial data dossiers, covering, amongst other things, their effects on the environment and non-target species, safety in use and any residues they may leave in food."* However, in the US it is actually a federal offence to claim that pesticides are safe, even when using qualifying phrases and in the UK a 1989 HSE document regarding pesticides states *"Remember: there is no such thing as a "safe" pesticide."* Also the late Professor Dennis

Parke, Former Chairman WHO Joint Meeting on Pesticide Residues stated "*Not a single tested pesticide has ever been proven safe.*"

- Georgina Downs campaigns to highlight the effects of pesticide use in rural Britain and has lived next to regularly sprayed fields for 20 years. She has investigated the history of crop-spraying and the regulatory system for pesticides and met with Government Ministers (*Lord Whitty, DEFRA Minister for Food and Farming and Michael Meacher, Former Minister for the Environment on December 17th 2002 and Alun Michael, Minister for Rural Affairs on December 17th 2003*) to present her case for a change in the regulations and legislation governing agricultural spraying. She has also produced 2 videos "*Pesticide Exposures for People in Agricultural Areas – Part 1 Pesticides in the Air; Part 2 The Hidden Costs*" to illustrate chemical exposure and the effects on people living in rural areas. (*See attached flyer in pdf. format*)
- She has called for an immediate ban on crop-spraying and the use of pesticides near to people's homes, schools, workplaces and any other places of human habitation and for the introduction of a new legal obligation to warn people before spraying and to provide the necessary chemical information
- Ms. Downs' campaign was featured on The Food Police BBC1 March 26th 2003; The Observer on April 13th 2003 ("*Georgina's Fight Against Toxic Peril*" and "*Can We Have a Breath of Fresh Air?*") Today programme BBC Radio 4 July 11th 2002; Farming Today BBC Radio 4 on March 25th, May 3rd and July 22nd 2003; Sunday Telegraph on June 30th and July 28th 2002, March 23rd, May 5th and 31st August 2003; BBC Breakfast News August 5th 2003; You and Yours BBC Radio 4 on September 1st, November 6th and 12th 2003; That's Esther ITV January 25th 2004 and in various other media
- DEFRA launched a Consultation on crop-spraying on July 21st 2003. The first part was in relation to making it a legal obligation to notify people before any spraying application and to provide the information on the chemicals to be used. The second part was in relation to introducing mandatory no-spray zones around residential areas. This Consultation resulted in the highest number of responses since DEFRA records began. The result of the Consultation is due shortly

For further information in relation to Ms. Downs' submission to the DEFRA Consultation and accompanying video, featuring people from all over the country reporting clusters of acute and chronic long-term illnesses and diseases in communities surrounded by sprayed fields or any other aspect of Ms. Downs' campaign

Contact: Georgina Downs

Telephone: 01243 773846

Email: georginadowns@yahoo.co.uk

Campaign: "A Breath of Fresh Air?"