

PRESS RELEASE

Toxic Politics

Pesticide Policy has to change to protect public health

A prominent pesticide campaigner is asking the Government to explain why they launched a Consultation on crop-spraying with the claim that there is no risk to health for people in the countryside and that pesticides are safe, when there is no evidence to support this view.

Georgina Downs has conducted a determined campaign to change Government Policy that has at last forced this matter into the public arena. In her response to the Government's Consultation on public access to information on pesticide use she has stated that the claims made by DEFRA in launching this Consultation are not only factually inaccurate and seriously misleading to both farmers and the public, but are obviously downright dangerous. Ms. Downs says that she does not believe based on the evidence that these claims would stand up in a court of law.

"The Advisory Committee on Pesticides has stated on a number of occasions that science cannot guarantee complete safety or zero risk," Ms. Downs explains, "so why then did DEFRA launch this Consultation stating that there is no risk to people in the countryside from crop-spraying and that pesticides are safe? There has been over 50 years of documented scientific and medical evidence in relation to pesticides and their damaging effects on human health, including from Government's very own documentation."

Ms. Downs says that there are many questions that need to be asked regarding DEFRA's overall handling of the Consultation process.

In responding to the Consultation proposals Ms. Downs has criticised the existing regulations and monitoring system as *"totally inadequate."* She says that the current system is completely unacceptable for public health and fully welcomes the Government's proposals to rectify the situation, as members of the public have a fundamental right to know what chemicals they are exposed to.

Ms. Downs fully supports the Government's proposals for mandatory disclosure of spray records as well as prior notification of all spray operations along with the information on the chemicals to be used. She states *"the current voluntary and self-regulatory measures like the Green Code are completely unacceptable in this situation. Therefore the introduction of statutory measures is essential."*

She states that this information is also vital for the correct assessment and treatment of a patient if adverse health effects are suffered which is imperative for feeding back into the monitoring system otherwise *"pesticide related ill-health statistics will never have a hope of being accurate or complete."*

She recommends that full disclosure of spray records should be made directly to any member of the public who enquires, as well as to any other parties who may have been appointed by an enquirer to act on their behalf. (ie. doctors/medical professionals/lawyers etc.)

She recommends the use of a Hotline system and warning signs in the area to give residents and other members of the public prior notification before any spraying and to provide information on the chemicals to be used. She believes that the Government should provide financial assistance where needed.

She recommends that such notification could be the subject of a new schedule provision with the legal basis like that for aerial spraying and that the statutory conditions of use in the approval for **all** pesticides (and not just sulphuric acid) should also contain the same detailed requirements. The Green Code should have legal status, with amendments that would incorporate these requirements as well.

Ms. Downs also points out that although the measures proposed will help provide the necessary information to members of the public who are exposed, the fundamental point remains that they should not be exposed in the first place. Therefore she recommends that a ban on crop-spraying near human habitation is essential and an urgent priority.

Ms. Downs states, *"The fact that there is no existing law to protect members of the public from exposure to known hazardous chemicals is unacceptable, especially in relation to babies, children, pregnant women, the elderly and those who are already ill. People are not being informed about the true dangers and risks that are inherent in the spraying of over 25,000 tonnes of agricultural chemicals on British farmland every year. Yet members of the public have a fundamental right to know the information necessary to make informed and knowledgeable decisions to protect their own health."*

The deadline for the first Consultation has now been extended to September 30th and Ms. Downs urges anyone who lives or works near regularly sprayed areas who also have the direct experience of this situation and other members of the public to respond to:-

Russell Wedgbury (russell.wedgbury@psd.defra.gsi.gov.uk 01904 455749) or Caroline Kennedy (caroline.kennedy@psd.defra.gsi.gov.uk 01904 455706) of DEFRA's Pesticides Safety Directorate in York. The deadline for the second Consultation remains the 31st October.

— **Notes to editors** ----

- Pesticides are poisonous chemicals and are extremely hazardous to human health
- The principle aim of pesticide regulation in the UK is supposed to be the protection of public health
- There is 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
- Countless numbers of people have regularly suffered ill-health effects following exposure to these chemicals and Ms. Downs has been contacted by people from all over the country who are reporting clusters of cancers, neurological diseases and other medical conditions in communities surrounded by regularly sprayed fields
- Ms. Downs has lived next to regularly sprayed fields for 20 years. She was invited by Professor David Coggon, Chairman of the Government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides to present a

paper entitled "*Why the bystander risk assessment does not equate to real-life exposure scenarios*," for their Open Meeting on July 10th 2002. The paper and transcripts of the meeting can be found at www.pesticides.gov.uk

- Ms. Downs also produced a video illustrating chemical exposure that was also presented at the ACP meeting and is available upon request
- Ms. Downs met with Lord Whitty and Michael Meacher on December 17th 2002 to present her case for a change in the regulations and legislation governing agricultural spraying. She has called for a 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; The Observer on April 13th ("*Georgina's Fight Against Toxic Peril*" and "*Can We Have a Breath of Fresh Air?*") on Farming Today BBC Radio 4 on March 25th and May 3rd; (NB. The HSE admitted on this programme that it has absolutely no idea how many people in the countryside are actually suffering from ill-health that's related to pesticides) and in various other media
- DEFRA launched a Consultation on Crop-spraying on July 21st. The DEFRA News Release and Consultation links are at: www.defra.gov.uk/news/2003/030721a.htm The Consultation Information is available at: <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/applicant/aahip/aahl0320.htm>
- Further information in relation to Ms. Downs' submission to the Government's Consultation "*Plans for Greater Access to Information about Crop-Spraying*" is available on request

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