

PRESS RELEASE – 14TH APRIL 2015

Response to the Green Party's manifesto pledge to prohibit the use of crop pesticides in the locality of residents' homes, schools, children's playgrounds

The Green Party has today published its manifesto prior to the General Election.¹ On page 14 of the full manifesto the Green Party pledges to:

“Secure protection of rural residents and communities from exposure to pesticides sprayed on nearby crop fields and prohibit the use of pesticides in the locality of homes, schools and children's playgrounds.”

In response, multi award winning campaigner Georgina Downs of the UK Pesticides Campaign www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk who has campaigned tirelessly for such action for the last 14 years says

“Rural residents all over the country who live in crop sprayed areas will be pleased to see the Green Party's manifesto pledge to secure the protection of rural residents and communities and to prohibit the use of pesticides in the locality of residents' homes, schools, and children's playgrounds. It is heartening to see a political party actually standing up for the citizens in this country, especially those most vulnerable, rather than the usual big business interests.

*This is a policy area that should be a priority for **all** political parties and which cannot be compromised on, as it involves public health protection.*

After all, the primary duty of any Government is to protect its people.

Yet, so far, the Greens are the one and only party that has vowed to act.

Therefore the UK Pesticides Campaign calls on ALL the political parties to pledge to take action on this issue considering the catastrophic failure, to date, to protect rural residents from the cocktails of poisons sprayed on crops, and throughout every year.”

Ms. Downs points out that the failure to protect residents has been due to the fact that there are fundamental failings in the way that pesticides have been approved. As to date, the official method used by regulators for assessing the risks to people from crop spraying - and under which

many thousands of pesticide products have been approved - has been based on the model of a short term 'bystander', occasionally exposed, for just a few minutes, and to just one individual pesticide at any time.

This means that pesticides have been approved for decades without first assessing the health risks for people who actually **live** in crop sprayed areas, as the real life exposure for residents, as opposed to a mere bystander, is both repeated acute and chronic exposure over the long term, it is cumulative, and is to mixtures and cocktails of pesticides used on crops. *(NB. There are approx. 2,000 pesticide products currently approved for agricultural use in the UK alone.² Each product formulation in itself can contain a number of active ingredients, as well as other hazardous chemicals, such as solvents, surfactants and co-formulants).*

This includes the astonishing fact that there has been no assessment at all before the approval of any pesticide for babies and children that live in the crop-sprayed areas, nor pregnant women, or people already ill.

Ms. Downs states, “Considering how many millions of citizens will be living in this situation then this is, without a doubt, as I have always rightly maintained, a public health and safety failure on a truly scandalous scale, and especially considering the absolute requirement in EU law that pesticides can only be authorised for use if it has been established that there will be no immediate or delayed harmful effect on human health, including for residents.³

The absence of any such risk assessment for residents means that no pesticide should ever have been approved for use in the first place for spraying in the locality of homes, schools and children's playgrounds.

Further, unlike operators, residents will not be in filtered cabs and/or have any personal protective equipment, and in any event, they would obviously not be expected to wear it on their own property and land.

Rural citizens have been put in a massive guinea pig-style experiment and for which many of us residents have had to suffer the serious, devastating – and in some cases fatal – consequences.

There are so many horrific stories of people being poisoned from crop spraying near to their homes, and many involve children.

Despite this, both the Labour Government and the coalition failed to act to secure the protection of rural residents in the UK from toxic pesticides.”

Ms. Downs goes on to state, “This cannot be construed as merely a “green” issue, as it is actually a serious public health issue of significant public importance.

Therefore, whichever party or parties forms the next Government here in the UK, they must as a matter of urgency secure the protection of people in the countryside by prohibiting the use of pesticides in sizeable distances (as small buffer zones won’t be protecting anyone considering how far pesticides are known to travel⁴) in the locality of residents’ homes, schools, children’s playgrounds, and other areas where such high exposure is likely to result.

It is an absolute no brainer that NO pesticides should be sprayed where people live and breathe, especially babies, young children, pregnant women, people already ill and/or disabled, and the elderly.

Rural residents constitute a large proportion of the voting public. The leaders of all political parties canvassing for votes in the hope of forming the next Government need to remember that the first duty of any Government is to protect its citizens, especially those most vulnerable, rather than the multi-billion pound pesticides industry and big business.

I would like to say thank you to the Greens for being the one party that has so far pledged to put an end to this public health scandal.

Many of us residents hope that the other parties will now also follow suit.”

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Notes to editors

Georgina Downs is a journalist (under both the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) and the British Guild of Agricultural Journalists (BGAJ)), and campaigner. She has lived next to regularly sprayed crop fields for

more than 30 years and runs the multi award winning UK Pesticides Campaign (www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk), which is the only campaign that specifically exists to highlight the exposures, risks, and acute and chronic adverse health impacts of agricultural pesticides on rural residents and communities.

The work of the UK Pesticides Campaign is widely recognised both nationally and internationally, and has led to a considerable number of prestigious environmental awards and nominations.

In 2001, Georgina Downs identified astonishing failings in the existing policy and approvals system for protecting rural residents from the health risks of pesticide use, including serious flaws in the Government's so-called "*bystander risk assessment*". The short term bystander model is inadequate to assess even the exposure of such bystanders, and does not and cannot address the real life exposure of **residents** who actually live in the locality of pesticide sprayed fields.

The coalition Government did announce in December 2013 that it was going to change its policy for assessing the risks to people from crop pesticides (although the stated changes were still woefully inadequate), and DEFRA confirmed that the changes due to take place could lead to some pesticides being withdrawn, and affect new ones coming through the system, http://www.theecologist.org/blogs_and_comments/commentators/2200835/pesticides_the_government_must_protect_us.html But the coalition has since dragged its feet about implementing any of the previously stated changes.

It is now beyond dispute that pesticides can cause a wide range of both acute, and chronic, adverse effects on human health. This includes irreversible and permanent chronic effects, illnesses and diseases.

Reputable scientific studies and reviews have concluded that long-term exposure to pesticides can disturb the function of different systems in the body, including nervous, endocrine, immune, reproductive, renal, cardiovascular, and respiratory systems.⁵

The pesticide manufacturers product data sheets themselves can carry various warnings such as "*Very toxic by inhalation,*" "*Do not breathe spray; fumes; vapour,*" "*Risk of serious damage to eyes,*" "*Harmful, possible risk of irreversible effects through inhalation,*" and even "*May be fatal if inhaled.*"

Cornell University's teaching module "*Toxicity of Pesticides*" clearly states that, "*Pesticides can: cause deformities in unborn offspring (teratogenic effects), cause cancer (carcinogenic effects), cause mutations (mutagenic effects), poison the nervous system (neurotoxicity), or block the natural defenses of the immune system (immunotoxicity).*"⁶ It goes on to warn that "*Irreversible effects are permanent and cannot be changed once they have occurred. Injury to the nervous system is usually irreversible since its cells cannot divide and be replaced. Irreversible effects include birth defects, mutations, and cancer.*"⁷

There has been a significant increase in recent years of a number of such chronic health conditions. According to latest cancer statistics an estimated 14.1 million new cancer cases and 8.2 million deaths occurred worldwide in 2012.⁸ There were 161,823 deaths from cancer in the UK *alone* in 2012.⁹ There were 331,487 people in the UK diagnosed with cancer in 2011,¹⁰ that's around 910 people every day. It is now 1 in 2 people who will develop some form of cancer at some point in their lives.

Just as alarming is the incidence of Parkinson's disease which is a progressive, neurodegenerative disease that has been repeatedly linked to pesticide exposure in scientific studies. One such study published in March 2009 found that exposure to just two pesticides within 500 metres of residents' homes increased the risk of Parkinson's Disease by 75 per cent.¹¹ According to Parkinson's statistics, 127,000 people live with Parkinson's in the UK, or 1 in 500 people.¹² There is currently no cure.¹³

Over the last 14 years, the UK Pesticides Campaign has continued to receive reports of both acute health effects, as well as chronic long-term effects, illnesses and diseases, from residents living in the locality of crop sprayed fields.

The acute effects reported are the same as those recorded in the UK Government's own monitoring system. They include chemical burns to the eyes and skin, rashes and blisters, sore throats, burnt vocal chords, respiratory irritation, breathing problems, difficulty swallowing, headaches, dizziness, vomiting, stomach pains, and flu-type illnesses.

The most common chronic long-term illnesses reported to the campaign include neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease and neurological damage; and various cancers, especially those of the breast and brain, leukaemia, non-Hodgkins lymphoma, among others.

Chemical farming is costing the UK many millions, probably even billions, every year. Indeed, the entire financial analysis of the issue by successive Governments has been hopelessly flawed because it has **never** taken account or factored in the wider, destructive impacts of pesticides.

For instance, the cost to the UK economy in relation to just cancer and Parkinson's is colossal. In 2008 cancer cost £5.13 billion in terms of NHS costs alone, and the total costs to society in England was estimated to be a staggering £18.33 billion, with these costs predicted to increase to £24.72 billion by 2020.¹⁴ Similarly, it has been estimated that the total cost of Parkinson's Disease in the UK could be as high as £3.3 billion per year.¹⁵ **Although there are a number of different causes for these chronic conditions, even if pesticides are only causing a proportion, the resulting expenditure would still be enormous, particularly when added up with the health costs of other related conditions.** (Obviously it goes without saying that the personal and human costs to those suffering such health conditions, and the impacts on all those around them, cannot be calculated in financial terms).

That is not all. There are huge environmental costs of pesticide use, like the estimated £140 million per year spent removing pesticides from drinking water,¹⁶ and the approximate £4.75 million used for monitoring pesticides at 2500 surface and groundwater sites,¹⁷ and the estimated £5.4 million for pesticide monitoring in both food and livestock.¹⁸

Such external costs would be eliminated if agricultural policies are fundamentally shifted towards utilizing non-chemical farming methods.

It goes without saying that no toxic chemicals that can harm the health of humans should be used to grow food.

References

1. The Green Party's full manifesto can be seen at:- <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/we-stand-for/2015-manifesto.html>

2. According to the regulators, the Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD), in pers comm in November 2012.

3. Article 4, paragraph 3(b) of the EU Regulation 1107/2009 which can be seen at:- <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32009R1107>

*NB. Also, as a direct result of the work of the UK Pesticides Campaign, rural residents are now specifically defined as a "*vulnerable group*" in Article 3, paragraph 14, of this EU Regulation which recognises that residents are "*subject to high pesticide exposure over the long term.*"

4. Scientific studies have found pesticides **miles** away from where they were originally applied. For example, the reputable study in California (Lee *et al*, "*Community Exposures to Airborne Agricultural Pesticides in California: Ranking of Inhalation Risks*" (2002)) that found pesticides located up to **3 miles away** from the treated areas, and calculated health risks for rural residents and communities living within those distances. Another study involving nearly 700 Californian women showed that living within a mile of farms where certain pesticides are sprayed, during critical weeks in pregnancy, increased by up to 120% the chance of losing the baby through birth defects. (Bell *et al*). Another study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) in 2005 (Alarcon *et al*, entitled, "*Acute Illnesses Associated with Pesticide Exposure at Schools*") that confirmed acute illnesses in children and employees from pesticides sprayed on farmland in the locality of schools, and that pointed out that at the time the study was prepared, that a number of US states required the prohibition of spraying in the locality of schools in an attempt to protect children from exposure, including one state where the distance of the area where the use of pesticides is prohibited in the locality of schools is **2.5 miles**.

5. For example, the important review published 15th April 2013 in *Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology* regarding the chronic health impacts of pesticides entitled

“Pesticides and Human Chronic Diseases; Evidences, Mechanisms, and Perspectives” and which can be seen at:-
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0041008X13000549>

The review concluded that long-term contact to pesticides can disturb the function of different systems in the body, including nervous, endocrine, immune, reproductive, renal, cardiovascular, and respiratory systems. There are a vast number of references contained within this review to studies that found associations of exposure to pesticides with a wide range of chronic diseases, **(and this includes numerous studies relating to residents living in the locality of pesticide sprayed fields)**. These chronic diseases include, cancers of the breast, prostate, lung, brain (including childhood brain cancer), kidney, testicles, pancreas, oesophagus, stomach, bladder, bone, as well as non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, multiple myeloma, soft tissue sarcoma, leukaemia, (including childhood leukaemia), and other chronic health impacts include, birth defects, reproductive disorders, neuro degenerative diseases (including Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)), cardio-vascular diseases, respiratory diseases, diabetes (Type 1, 2 and gestational), chronic renal diseases, and autoimmune diseases (such as rheumatoid arthritis, and systemic lupus erythematosus).

The review stated that, taken together, the chronic diseases discussed within the review are considered as the major disorders affecting public health in the 21st century, and it concluded that it is time to adopt a **preventive approach** and find efficient alternatives to using pesticides.

Such findings again add further support and vindication to the many residents who have continued to raise concerns over the association of pesticides and such chronic conditions.

6. To see this quote in Cornell University’s teaching module *“Toxicity of Pesticides”* click on *“Check Answer”* to the study question at:-
<http://psep.cce.cornell.edu/Tutorials/core-tutorial/xml/CoreTest.aspx?Q=4-19>

7. This quote can be seen in Cornell University’s teaching module *“Toxicity of Pesticides”* at <http://psep.cce.cornell.edu/Tutorials/core-tutorial/module04/index.aspx>

8. Source: <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerstats/world/>

9. Source: <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerstats/mortality/>

10. Source: <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerstats/incidence/>

11. *“Parkinson’s Disease and Residential Exposure to Maneb and Paraquat From Agricultural Applications in the Central Valley of California,”* by Sadie Costello, Myles Cockburn, Jeff Bronstein, Xinbo Zhang, Beate Ritz.

12. Source: Parkinson's statistics taken from the Parkinson's UK website at:- http://www.parkinsons.org.uk/about_parkinsons/what_is_parkinsons.aspx

13. Ibid.

14. Policy Exchange, Research Note, Feb. 2010, entitled "*The cost of cancer*," page 1, which can be seen at <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/the%20cost%20of%20cancer%20-%20feb%202010.pdf>

15. Source: "*The economic impact of Parkinson's disease*" by Leslie J Findley, published in September 2007. Abstract can be seen at:- [http://www.prd-journal.com/article/S1353-8020\(07\)00105-8/abstract](http://www.prd-journal.com/article/S1353-8020(07)00105-8/abstract)

16. Source: Jules Pretty, Professor of Environment and Society in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Essex.

17. Source: "*An assessment of the total external costs of UK agriculture*," Prof Jules Pretty *et al*, August 2000.

18. Source: "*An assessment of the total external costs of UK agriculture*," by Prof Jules Pretty *et al*, August 2000