

OP sheep dips

The UK Government announced on 20 December 1999 that OP sheep dips will be withdrawn from the market until modified containers are available to minimise operator exposure to dip concentrate. This measure is stated to be part of an action plan which includes revoking marketing approvals for three OP compounds used in veterinary medicine other than sheep dips and for which full safety data have not been submitted. Other measures in the plan are - implementing a range of measures to promote good practice and conducting a targeted research programme to implement recommendations made by the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food and other advisory committees.

The National Office of Animal Health (NOAH), the industry association which represents manufacturers of animal medicines, has expressed astonishment that the Government has "felt the need to resort to precipitate action on OP dips by recalling all current packs within 20 working days", with sheep farmers having to return their stocks to distributors who then have to return them to manufacturers. All this had to be done by 31 January 2000. This was described by NOAH as a "seemingly impossible task".

Regulatory and advisory committees have noted that, whilst possible ill-health effects from prolonged exposure to OPs remain unproven, there remains a question of whether there may be a small group of individuals who are particularly susceptible to OPs.

France to tax agrochemicals on ecological risk

French farmers face taxes on their use of agricultural chemicals. Pesticides are being grouped into seven categories depending on their ecological risk and taxed up to FFR 11/kg active ingredient. For example, the insecticide aldicarb (Temik) will be taxed at FFR 1.1/kg, raising the price to FFR 11/ha. Revenue of some FFR 300 M is initially expected. Fertilizer is expected to be included in the scheme soon. The measure has been ratified by the Council of Ministers and government approval is expected in time for its introduction in January 2000.

California pesticide use increased in 1998

Preliminary figures released by the California Department of Pesticide

Regulation (DPR) indicate that overall pesticide usage in the state increased by 5% in 1998 to 215 M pounds. The use of reduced-risk pesticides increased by over 350% to 330,882 pounds. Cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticide usage fell nearly 20% from the 1997 usage of 16.2 M pounds. Sulfur usage rose by 13.7 M pounds. Diazinon use was down from 955,000 pounds to 874,662 pounds with chlorpyrifos usage down from 3.2 M pounds to 2.4 M pounds. Use of pesticides classed as reproductive toxins was about 29.5 M pounds (32.6 M pounds in 1997). Methyl bromide usage was down from 15.7 M pounds to about 13.9 M pounds.

'The Future of Food' Chamber of Commerce meeting

The Chamber of Commerce, USA, held the first of three conferences in November 1999, which will examine 'The future of food'. Speakers considered that industry has the main role in ensuring the safety of food. There will be a need for food regulation to change with new food additives, pesticides and genetically modified foods. In particular more detailed risk analysis will be required, for banning existing products, such as pesticides, as well as for approval of new products. Such an analysis has been carried out for organophosphates and carbamates. The health risks from these pesticides in food is small, whereas several risks from banning the pesticides are listed, including the return of pests that are responsible for other health problems. The US-EPA is now considering aggregate risks of each pesticide and its ingestion from food and water and by contact, such as children rolling on a lawn. The introduction of zero tolerance is now considered to have been an overreaction.

GM crops

...GM labelling required only if content above 1%

In the UK, foods containing genetically modified (GM) ingredients will not have to declare that is the case on the label, so long as the GM content of any particular ingredient does not exceed 1%. It is intended that the new threshold will overcome the difficulty of manufacturers who attempt to produce GM-free produce, but find that there is a small amount of contamination because of imperfect separation procedures. The lobby group Greenpeace and some members of the European parliament felt that the 1%

threshold was too high, but they have welcomed the move in principle. However, the US trade mission in Brussels said that 2% would have been more appropriate, given that the majority of trade contracts have 2% admixture tolerances. Overall it is still opposed to the process of GM labeling because it claims it raises costs when there are no health risks involved. The EC expects to apply the rules to all GM organisms, although at the moment they only apply to ready approved GM soybeans and maize.

...UK ban on GM crops to be extended

The UK government has announced a 3-year extension to the voluntary ban on commercial growing of genetically modified (GM) crops. The Environment minister has said that there will be no commercial plantings of GM crops until after the farm-scale evaluations were completed. In 1998, the farm-scale trials began and are scheduled to be completed in 2002. The results are intended to quantify the effect on biodiversity of growing GM crops. The government is sticking to its position that there are no legal scientific, or safety reasons for any ban or moratorium. The Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops says the trials would help to build up public confidence in GM crops by progressing on the basis of sound science.

...Bt corn poses little risk to monarch butterflies

The Agricultural Biotechnology Stewardship Working Group, which includes five agricultural biotechnology companies, commissioned research with \$100,000 of industrial funds to study the effects of pollen, travelling from Bt maize fields, on monarch caterpillars feeding on nearby milkweed plants. Preliminary results suggest there are few risks, but counter arguments are cited. The US-EPA may introduce changes for the 2000 growing season based on the results of research.

FDA public meetings on regulation of GM foods

Consumer groups in the USA have called for labelling of genetically engineered foods. The US-FDA only seeks such labelling if the nutritional value of the genetically modified food is substantially different from its conventional analogue or if a gene from a known allergen is added to a food. There are more than 40 genetically modified food products being sold, mainly

modified with *Bacillus thuringiensis* to kill insect pests or to resist a company's herbicide. In 1999, about 33.3% of maize and 50% of soybeans grown in the USA were genetically modified. Other crops often so altered include cotton, canola and potatoes.

Spray drift

On 14 December 1999 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a factsheet on their position on pesticide spray drift, which can expose people, wildlife and the environment to detrimental levels of pesticides. Sections in the factsheet include:

- What is pesticide Spray Drift?
- How Does Spray Drift Occur?
- What are the Impacts of Spray Drift?
- How Does EPA View Off-Target Spray Drift?
- How Does EPA Help Protect People and the Environment from Off-Target Spray Drift?
- Other Activities that Promote Awareness and Education of Spray Drift Issues
- Where to Direct Complaints About Spray Drift
- Further Information

The fact sheet can be viewed on <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizens/spraydrift.htm>

Legislation to seek notification before pesticide use in schools

The US is considering legislation to ensure that parents are notified before pesticides are sprayed around schools. The legislation would require schools to notify parents 72 hours before pesticide use. Supporters of the legislation say it is needed because children are vulnerable to pesticides because their immune and nervous systems are still developing. Some states including Maryland and Connecticut have passed laws requiring parental notification.

Endocrine disruption

In December 1999 the UK Government signed an agreement with Japan to collaborate on research into endocrine hormone disruption in the aquatic environment. A workshop is to be held for UK and Japanese scientists to exchange information on existing research and identify possible areas for cooperation and

collaboration. The UK side will be coordinated by the Interdepartmental Group on Endocrine Disrupters, led by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

EPA proposes antimicrobial registration requirements

A rule to regulate the registration requirements for antimicrobial pesticide products has been proposed in the US by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Registration procedures would be created together with labeling standards for antimicrobial health products and a modification of the notification process for conformation to the statutorily prescribed process. The ruling would also require the implementation of certain efficacy performance standards and limit the duration of registrations bearing public health claims to five years. The proposed requirements will facilitate the promotion of international harmonization efforts.

Pesticide residues in potatoes

The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides in the UK has considered results from a survey covering residues of the pesticide aldicarb in potatoes. The committee has concluded that even consumers of large quantities of potatoes with the highest residues detected would be unlikely to suffer any adverse health effects. This survey marks the end of a long-term programme which has confirmed that there can be considerable variation in residues between individual units of fruit and vegetables.

UK labelling of organophosphates and carbamates

The Pesticides Registration Section of the UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) are currently carrying out a review of all anticholinesterase (organophosphate and carbamate) compounds present in agricultural and non-agricultural pesticide formulations. Ministers initiated the review because of growing public concern over the use of these compounds. A re-labeling strategy has been agreed by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides to help inform and educate pesticide users. This will mean that all new and current pesticidal formulations containing organophosphate/carbamate compounds will have an

additional warning incorporated into the product label phrases.

On 10 January 2000 PSD issued an update of progress on its review of anticholinesterase compounds. As of 18 September 1999, a total of 17 compounds had not been supported by approval holders. Dossiers had been received for 21 of the remaining substances; PSD is now working on Phase III of the review of these active substances and is conducting initial examinations to see if they are suitable to support continued approval of the products; the findings will be presented to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. A further 2 active substances (fenpropimorph and butoxycarboxim) has now been added to the data call-in, with a data submission deadline of September 2000.

"No Pesticides Day"

On December 3, 1999, Pesticide Action Network (PAN) groups around the world observed "No Pesticides Day" with a host of activities to draw attention to the possible life-threatening impacts of chemical pesticides on people and the environment. This date was chosen to honor those who died as well as those still suffering as a result of the 1984 disaster in Bhopal, India.

Launch of PAN International Web site
The PAN International Web site was launched on No Pesticides Day. The Web site was developed by PAN North America in collaboration with the other PAN Regional Centers. The site is a comprehensive entry point on the Web to the entire international PAN network. It offers information about PAN and its international work, and links to each Regional Center's Web site. The address is <http://www.pan-international.org>.

"The current trends of globalization and the industrialization of agriculture are promoting intensive use of hazardous pesticides which has increased the suffering of millions of people in rural agriculture and the plantation sector the world over," stated Sarojeni V. Rengam, Executive Director of PAN Asia and the Pacific. "Each year approximately three million people are poisoned and 200,000 die from pesticide misuse. While many of the reported ill-effects are acute cases of pesticide poisoning, chronic long-term effects such as cancer and reproductive problems are of increasing concern."

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