

Statement in Support of the Elimination of Lindane Use in North America

In June 2002, the environment ministers from Canada, Mexico, and the United States resolved to develop a North American Regional Action Plan (NARAP) for lindane through the Commission for Environmental Cooperation of North America. The Task Force on Lindane will gather in Montreal, Canada September 28-30, 2004 to draft the NARAP.

We direct the following statement, supported by the undersigned non-governmental organizations in Canada, Mexico, and the U.S., to the North American Task Force on Lindane and the ministers of environment and health from each country.

Background

All three countries continue to allow pharmaceutical lindane use for pediculosis, lice, and scabies treatment. In Mexico, lindane is also used on livestock and as a seed insecticide for soil pest control. The 2002 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Re-registration Eligibility Decision allows lindane to be used as seed treatment for six grain crops: corn, wheat, barley, oats, rye, and sorghum. All remaining agricultural uses of lindane in Canada will no longer be permitted on December 31, 2004.

Lindane is a persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic organochlorine insecticide. Lindane is banned by 17 countries. It is harmful to the environment and human health. Children are particularly vulnerable to the toxic effects of lindane. Case-controlled research shows a significant association between the incidences of brain tumors in children with the use of lindane-containing lice shampoos. The International Agency for Research in Cancer (IARC) and the U.S. EPA classify lindane as a possible human carcinogen. Lindane is a potent neurotoxin, with symptoms from small exposures by ingestion or skin absorption ranging from nausea, dizziness, and muscular weakness, to tremors and convulsions. Chronic effects include damage to the nervous system and liver disease. Worker exposures have resulted in blood disorders, headaches, convulsions, and disruption of the reproductive hormones of the endocrine system.

Lindane is highly persistent and travels long distances via atmospheric and oceanic currents. In fact, lindane, with its isomers, is the most abundant pesticide in Arctic air and water. Indigenous peoples of the north who rely on traditional diets of marine mammals and fish are particularly at risk from lindane exposure through foods. Lindane contaminates drinking water sources. The Los Angeles County Sanitation District estimates that one dose of a lindane treatment for head lice can pollute 6 million gallons of water to levels exceeding drinking water standards. This threat to clean drinking water, and the enormous costs of clean up, prompted California to ban lindane shampoos in 2002. Lindane is highly toxic to aquatic invertebrates, fish, and bees. It is a potential endocrine disruptor in birds, mammals, and fish. Safe and affordable alternatives to the uses of lindane are available for pharmaceutical, veterinary, and agricultural uses.

The undersigned organizations call upon the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States to specify the following actions in the North American Regional Action Plan for Lindane, applicable to the national policies in each of the three countries:

- Immediate elimination of pharmaceutical, veterinary, and agricultural uses of lindane with substitution of safe, affordable alternatives;
- Commitment to research and education programs that support alternatives to lindane, giving top priority to preventative and least-toxic alternatives;
- Delivery of education programs about the risks of lindane, emphasizing the protection of exposed populations of children, Indigenous peoples, and workers; and
- Active support for the expeditious inclusion of lindane among the substances scheduled for elimination under Annex A of the Stockholm (POPs) Convention.

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