

# Invisible News

ISSUE 5

BROUGHT to YOU by the GENEVA CHEMICALS & WASTE CLUSTER at the 4<sup>th</sup> UN Environment Assembly

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## CHEMICALS & WASTE on your PLATE?

### You really are, what you eat!

It's true: what you put in your stomach has a profound impact on your health and wellbeing. For the most part, you can't see the chemicals in your food, but that doesn't mean they are not there.

We need food. The intensification and industrialization in agriculture, using ever-increasing amounts of chemical inputs, has helped our world to feed a rapidly increasing population. But, many of the chemical pesticides which accompanied this process, and which are still in use in many parts of the world today, have been proven to be highly hazardous. From your indoor plants to your garden to the great swathes of the planet set aside for agriculture, harmful pesticides should not be used.

Take Dicofol, a pesticide that has been used in agriculture to control mites on a variety of field crops, fruits, vegetables, ornamentals, cotton, and tea. Similar to DDT, it is a toxic concentrated formulation found in the environment and humans. Prolonged or repeated exposure to dicofol can cause skin irritation and nervous disorders and it is highly toxic in fish, invertebrates, algae and birds.

Toxic pesticides are not only bad for the environment and bad for consumers, they can also be life-threatening for the farmers and farm-workers who use them. According to FAO, an estimated 200,000 workers die from pesticide poisoning every year. And, since they are twice as likely to be illiterate than men, women in rural areas of developing countries often overlook important safety information, increasing their exposure to harmful chemicals.

Human exposure to mercury occurs mainly through eating contaminated fish and shellfish. Further up the foodchain concentrations are higher, for example in large predatory fish such as swordfish or certain tunas. Sadly, unborn and young children are particularly vulnerable to neurotoxic effects of mercury.



*Even your choice of beverage is significant: tea and coffee can both be grown without harmful chemicals such as Endosulfan, which is listed under both the Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions*

### Making the Invisible, Visible

The Geneva Chemicals & Waste Cluster is a group of international organisations in Geneva which collectively work to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals and waste. This lounge area installation is brought to you by six of this cluster, namely:

- Secretariat of the [Basel, Rotterdam, & Stockholm Conventions \(BRS\)](#);
- Secretariat of the [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#);
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management ([SAICM](#)); and
- [UN Environment](#), Chemicals and Health Branch (UNEP)

See [www.brsmeas.org](http://www.brsmeas.org) [www.mercuryconvention.org](http://www.mercuryconvention.org) [www.saicm.org](http://www.saicm.org) and [www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste](http://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste) for more info



*Chemical pesticides used on food crops can impact the environment, the consumer, but especially the farm-worker, particularly if safety information is absent, illegible or overlooked*

### Seek out the healthy options whenever possible

The benefits of organic agriculture, which does not use chemical pesticides, are well known. Choosing this kind of produce is likely to be a sensible choice.

Used appropriately and safely, pesticides can nonetheless help to protect food and other crops from excessive damage by pests and diseases and can protect against vector-borne diseases. Pesticides also play important roles in the protection of fresh produce during transport over long distances; in ensuring that shipments of fresh food do not carry unwanted pests and diseases; and in the preservation of stored bulk foods such as grain. Over-reliance on toxic pesticides, however, can damage the health of farmers and consumers as well as the environment and the economy. In many cases pesticide use can be reduced significantly without compromising production quality or quantity.

Over-reliance on one source of protein can also lead to higher risks. Varying your fish intake from species to species can help to reduce your risk of exposure to mercury, for example.

And remember that your consumer choices can shape the market, leading to positive changes for producers far away or on your doorstep.

#### What can you do?

- Read the next *Invisible News* sheets to educate yourself about the hazards;
- Visit the websites listed to find out more;
- Seek out safe alternatives when buying food: READ the labelling;
- Discuss with your children, relatives, neighbours.



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