Pesticide Action Network Europe

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels
14 November 2017

While mountainous South-Tyrol provides apples for all Europe, it is at the expense of local children who are chronically exposed to pesticides

South-Tyrol Organisation for Nature Conservation and Environment Protection, in collaboration with PAN Europe, recently published a report[1] on the contamination of local playgrounds by pesticides from industrial apple production. Grass samples reveal that 40% of the playgrounds are contaminated by pesticides, exposing local children to toxic chemicals.

Italian South Tyrol (Alto-Adige) is famous for tourism but also for hosting most of Italy's apple production. Ten percent of European Union's apples grow in South Tyrol. The varieties used are highly susceptible to pests[2], in the frame of a model of intensive monoculture production. In this area, apples are often grown next to and even inside villages, close to houses, schools or hospitals. Apple production is a very important economical sector in the region where agrochemicals are massively used, as revealed by this study, hence putting local populations at risk.

Seventy one playgrounds from the Etsch Valley were tested for pesticide active substances. Twenty nine samples (40%) tested positive for up to 4 pesticides, despite the fact that many playgrounds are more than 50m away from the fields. In the majority of the cases, the level of residues in grass is higher than that authorised in, for instance, salat, spinach and strawberries, that were harvested at the time the gras samples on the playgrounds were collected. Even though children do not eat grass, it is well established that skin is an important route of exposure. Further, these high levels imply that the rest of the environment (homes, gardens, vegetable gardens) are most likely highly contaminated as well.

Worryingly, the 2 most frequently detected pesticides are highly toxic to human health and the environment. Phosmet insecticide is even banned in Germany and Switzerland while fluazinam fungicide, apart from being toxic through inhalation and highly toxic to aquatic life, is also suspected to cause, infertility in case of *in utero* (unborn) exposure.

The EU directive 128/2009 on the sustainable use of pesticides clearly requests decision-makers to take measures to protect the population against harmful effects of pesticides, specifically vulnerable groups such as infants and children. South-Tyrol regional agriculture councilor defined non-sprayed buffer zones for specific areas but the results of this study show they are inefficient.

Koen Hertoge (PAN Europe board member) : « It is worrying to see that there is absolutely no legal and binding framework to protect children in our area. Immediate action is needed and specific areas should be defined as «zero-tolerance» areas where no residues

[1] http://www.pan-europe.info/resources/reports/2017/11/playground-contamination-study-south-tyrol
[2] http://www.agrios.it/en/for-consumers/apple-growing-in-south-tyrol/

should be found. We urge politicians to develop a legal framework in which the health of citizens and residents is better protected from pesticides»

Martin Dermine, project coordinator at PAN Europe said: „South-Tyrol's gorgeous landscapes are dramatically spoiled by apple monocultures, putting at risk people's health. We strongly advise the region to take example on the South-Tyrolean town of Mals in Vinschgau that decided in a referendum in 2014 to ban all pesticides from its territory. Beyond protecting human health and the environment, a shift towards sustainable farming would be a major asset for the region as pesticides might in the end repel tourists...".

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