



**Pesticide
Action
Network**
Europe

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Brussels, 9 May 2019

Top EU officials fought for higher pesticide exposure - secret documents show Health officials protected use of 32 dangerous pesticides

Newly released European Commission documents reveal a fight to cripple important European pesticide protections.

The haul of over 600 documents was obtained after a two year legal battle won by the Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN). They show top officials trying to protect chemical and farming interests from incoming European [rules](#) that were expected to directly ban up to 32 ([page 115](#)) endocrine disrupting (EDC) pesticides. The law set out specifically to protect human, animal health and the environment and followed 25 years of mounting scientific evidence linking EDC pesticides to severe human health impacts and gender-bending effects on animals. They may be the cause of [birth defects](#) that shocked France last year and made international news headlines.

The secret papers, released by [order](#) of European Court of Justice, show an internal struggle to define scientific criteria for identifying and banning EDC pesticides. Outnumbered environment and research department officials are seen resisting attempts by agriculture, enterprise, industry and even health department officials to water down the criteria by introducing non-scientific factors, such as farming profitability. They were joined by the Commission secretary general who orchestrated [documents [42](#), [559](#)] a flawed impact assessment process. Its bizarre early results downplayed health impacts [document [258](#)]; found that the more pesticides that remained in use, the less the impact on health and the environment [document [560](#)]; and that the fewer EDC pesticides identified, the better [document [273](#)].

The two year row was brought to an end by the European Court of Justice. In a case brought by an alarmed [document [259](#)] Swedish government, the court [ruled](#) that non-scientific aspects should play no part in setting of EDC criteria and the impact assessment was illegal.

The hostile majority of departments were trying to derail a “golden shield” protection for health and environment known as the ‘hazards approach’ to pesticides, according to PAN. Unique to Europe, the legal principle means that any pesticide found to be either EDC, carcinogenic, mutagenic, reprotoxic, persistent or bioaccumulative, even at very low doses, will be quickly banned throughout Europe. This has led to rejected food imports and trade friction with regions with weaker protections.

The endocrine criteria were finally published on 19 April 2018, five years overdue. The hazards approach survived, but the criteria were crippled in other ways. Eight of the 32 pesticides have been withdrawn for reasons other than EDC criteria. None have been banned because of the EDC rules and few will be, PAN says.

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe is a network of NGOs working to reduce the use of hazardous pesticides and have them replaced with ecologically sound alternatives. We work to eliminate dependency on chemical pesticides and to support safe sustainable pest control methods. Our network brings together 40 consumer, public health, and environmental organisations, and women’s groups from across Europe.



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The hazards approach continues to come under attack. Agrafacts reported on 5 April that DG Sante is reviewing a family of [endocrine laws](#), with a view to changing them and singling out the hazards approach, despite them being under a year old. A new [report](#) for the Commission, written together with industry-linked experts and supporters of anti-regulation pressure groups, recommends [scrapping](#) the hazards approach.

PAN Europe chemicals policy co-ordinator Hans Muilerman said: *“It took us years to get these documents. They did everything they could to keep them secret. What the papers revealed shocked me, even after 15 years working on pesticides. How can health officials try and twist a law designed to protect people into something that does the opposite, on behalf of industries causing serious illnesses? We think they want to see a globalised farming system in the mould of Monsanto, free of meaningful regulations. They aimed to allow pesticide exposure higher than what the law intended. These revelations could fuel popular concern that business interests run Brussels. We understand that concern, and see the deregulation forces at work. But some departments are seen fighting for fair, fact-based decisions. It was a clear political decision that gave Europe the hazards approach, a golden shield against toxic pesticides that officials must dutifully use in full. We hope the upcoming European elections will bring fresh leadership in Brussels to breathe new life into this and many other good EU laws.”*

In the decade to 2019, the number of EU approved pesticides doubled to about [500](#). A 2012 UNEP/WHO [report](#) suggests endocrine-related diseases are rising globally, with chemical exposure playing an important role. A 2016 Lancet [article](#) put the related disease costs in Europe at \$217 billion per year. Phasing out a range of pesticides will substantially improve the situation, PAN said. Swedish chemical agency KEMI in 2008 [advised](#) that 14 EDC pesticides should be banned without delay. Several remain on the market, including Epoxiconazole, Mancozeb, Metconazole, Thiocloprid and Tebuconazole.

[Individual states](#), the [European Parliament](#) and [Court of Justice](#) are increasingly pushing back against the Commission’s handling of chemical laws. France cites consistent [concerns](#) voiced by citizens about chemical exposure in their daily lives. European elections start in two weeks on 23 May. Official polls consistently find that Europeans are [concerned](#) about chemical exposure. Over a million signed a [petition](#) against pesticides. A European Parliament [resolution](#) calls for full and uniform use of the hazards approach.

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A document guide is available [here](#).

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