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New analysis reveals the shortfalls of the pesticide authorisation system in Europe and proposes solutions

A new White Paper, coordinated by Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe and produced by a group of 24 experts from the field of pesticides, risk assessment, human and environmental health identifies the many shortfalls in the safety assessment of pesticides in Europe that lead to dangerous substances being used in open spaces. The analysis also proposes concrete solutions on how to improve the pesticide risk assessment in Europe in line with the mandatory requirements of EU law.

The [White Paper](#) intends to feed the ongoing evaluation of the EU legislation on Pesticides (e.g. REFIT, General Food Law, PEST Committee), by supporting a higher level of protection from pesticides in Europe. It also aims at promoting the development and implementation of sustainable non-chemical alternative practices in our food production system.

This initiative has resulted in the establishment of ‘Citizens for Science in Pesticide Regulation’, a European Coalition that has produced [a manifesto](#) calling for “rigorous science, safe food, and a healthy environment”, which has been signed by more than 130 civil society organisations and institutions, as well as individual experts.

The European Pesticide Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 is underpinned by the precautionary principle and aims to ensure that pesticide substances or products placed on the market do not adversely affect human or animal health or the environment. However, “*the current model of pesticide risk assessment that determines the approval of pesticide substances in the European Union is problematic, as it fails to prevent the use of harmful chemicals in the production of our food*” emphasises the document.

The White Paper lists 18 structural and methodological major shortfalls that result in the use of harmful pesticides in agriculture and management of public or private areas.

Hans Muilerman, Chemical Officer at PAN Europe, holds accountable the involvement of the pesticide industry in the process: “*Industry is dominating the assessment process at all levels, testing, methodology, lobby, communication and court cases, it is more than time to reform the entire process and put industry at a good distance*”.

According to the White Paper, the prevention and precautionary principles are not implemented in risk assessment policy. Prof. Erik Millstone from University of Sussex, co-author of the White Paper, comments, “*If the EU wants its policies on pesticides to have scientific credibility and democratic legitimacy it must widen the scope of its risk assessments to ensure that it properly assesses the risks of commercial products as sold, rather than just the main active ingredient. It must also ensure that uncertainties are comprehensively acknowledged, and that the precautionary principle is applied consistently, not opportunistically.*”

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 White Paper shows that science is often misused or ‘outdated’ in pesticide risk assessment procedure, which is still based on old methodologies and fails to incorporate evidence from peer-reviewed scientific literature that could block the authorisation of a number of chemical products due to safety issues.

According to Dr. Peter Clausing, co-author of the White Paper and toxicologist at PAN Germany, “*Regulatory authorities repeatedly claim to have used a scientific approach. The White Paper reveals significant gaps and weaknesses concerning the science the authorities use for their risk assessment and it makes proposals for substantial improvements.*”

In a constructive approach, the White Paper also lists 18 ‘realistic and solid’ solutions directed to policy makers on how to overcome these shortfalls. One of the co-authors of the White Paper, Dr. Fiorella Belpoggi of the Ramazzini Institute in Italy, states, “*The proposed answers to the critical steps of the pesticide authorisation procedure aim to support the important decisions currently taken at the European institutions, that affect the public health of the European citizens.*”

A new approach in pesticide risk assessment is urgent. Researcher and White Paper co-author Paul Whaley from the Lancaster Environment Centre says, “*Over the last decade there have been a number of major advances in our understanding of how best to review scientific evidence of health risks posed by exposure to chemical substances. These advances must be reflected in pesticide risk assessment if we are to have fair, transparent and effective regulation which protects health and minimises the environmental impact of agriculture. The new White Paper, led by PAN, is an intelligent, forward-thinking contribution to advancing evidence-based pesticide risk management and is appropriate to the modern regulatory context.*”

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