

PRESS RELEASE

Urgent measures needed to tackle pesticide health risks in former Soviet Union

Pesticides pose a serious risk to health across many countries of the former Soviet Union, including in Armenia. Recent studies in six former Soviet republics have identified common practices that are putting farming families at high risk of exposure to these hazardous chemicals. The studies considered the risks to different groups, including women, children and seasonal workers.

An international meeting in Yerevan 14th – 16th April will bring together key people from participating countries to share the findings of these studies, consider lessons learned and identify urgent action to tackle the problems identified at both national and regional level. Among those attending will be Designated National Authorities to Rotterdam Convention and other Government representatives from each of the six countries, along with representatives of the FAO, and Civil Society Organisations.

Among the issues identified by the studies, are a very low use of appropriate protective equipment by people handling and using pesticides, and the repackaging of pesticides into inappropriate containers. Several incidents of poisoning were reported where people had mistakenly drunk pesticides stored in drinks bottles, for example. In most countries, more men reported using pesticides than women - but the proportion was highly variable. In Armenia, for example, more women are becoming involved in the use of pesticides because their husbands are travelling overseas for work. “We have to take seriously the fact that in Armenia women of reproductive age are getting increasingly involved in the activities associated with pesticide poisoning risks”, said Dr. Manvelyan, President of Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment NGO. Small scale studies in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan found that the number of children that reported being involved in using pesticides on the farm was higher than expected. Further work is needed to better understand the extent of children’s exposure and risk of poisoning.

Additionally, pesticide regulators and decision-makers also lack essential information on the scale and causes of the problem of pesticide poisoning that would help them to make more robust regulatory decisions.

The Rotterdam Convention facilitates this much needed exchange of information and supports its parties in elaborating national action plans. In addition, it gives developing countries a strong voice to raise their particular problems with severely hazardous pesticide formulations and bring it to a global attention”, Dr. Christine Fuell, Senior Technical Officer and Coordinator of FAO’s Rotterdam Convention Secretariat, said.

“In this region we have found that poor practice is very widespread in relation to pesticides and so is the experience of acute pesticide poisoning among rural families. Urgent measures are needed to better understand the problem, and to support authorities and farming families to improve safety” said Dr Sheila Willis of Pesticide Action Network UK, who has been co-ordinating the studies.

Notes for editors

The project - ***‘Improving capacities to eliminate and prevent recurrence of obsolete pesticides as a model for tackling unused hazardous chemicals in the former Soviet Union’*** - is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United

Nations (FAO) in collaboration with the partners, including international NGOs – Pesticides Action Network, the United Kingdom (PAN-UK) the Secretariat to the Rotterdam Convention, and in Armenia, the Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (AWHHE).

The meeting on 14th – 16th April is organized under the framework of the above mentioned project and hosted by The Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention (RC) and Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK). It is the culmination of a year's work with partner organisations in six countries; Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine. Over that time, baseline studies have been conducted by partner organisations in each of the countries to capture data concerning high risk practices and exposure scenarios in relation to pesticides. The data is being used to better characterise vulnerable groups; to understand how and when they are exposed to pesticides; and to gather information on their experience of pesticide poisoning.

A **press briefing** will be held during the meeting at which project co-ordinators and donors will be available for interview and photographs.

The briefing is at: 10.50am, Tuesday 14 April
 Ani Hall, Ani Plaza Hotel
 19 Sayat Nova Street, Yerevan, Armenia

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