

Arctic Tribal Leaders, Doctors, Parents and Advocates Call for New US Position on Pharmaceutical Uses of the Pesticide Lindane

WASHINGTON - April 2 - In the US, lindane is a pesticide approved for use in children's lice shampoo, but not on pets or plants. In much of the rest of the world, including Mexico, all uses of lindane have been banned for years. Parents, health professionals, and Arctic communities - whose food and breast milk are contaminated with a chemical they don't use - are urging US officials to close this loophole.

Government delegates will gather in Geneva early next month to decide whether lindane will be added to a list of chemicals targeted for a global phase out under the international Stockholm Convention.

In a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Acting Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration Joshua Sharfstein, a coalition of groups called on the agency leaders to support listing of lindane under the international treaty without exemption for lotions and shampoos ("pharmaceutical uses"). The letter also urged FDA to "take definitive action in ending pharmaceutical use of lindane domestically, as has already been accomplished in California."

"These lindane shampoos and lotions have already been banned in California and in many countries around the world," says Kristin Schafer, Associate Director for Advocacy with Pesticide Action Network North America. "US agencies must do their job, and take action now to protect children in the US and around the world from this persistent pesticide."

In addition to the letter, the groups submitted a scientific study from the journal Environmental Health Perspectives documenting the success of the 2001 California ban, as well as a compilation of personal stories from parents around the country who have used less hazardous methods to control lice.

"The California experience shows that a ban on lindane products leads to cleaner water and healthier children," says Dr. Sarah Janssen, co-author of the EHP article. "We have seen no lice or scabies outbreaks after more than seven years. There is simply no reason to keep these products on the market."

Exposure to lindane, a neurotoxic organochlorine pesticide, has been linked to seizures, developmental disabilities and hormone disruption. It is

known to be particularly hazardous to children. Lindane and associated isomers are among the most ubiquitous chemicals in the Arctic environment, contaminating traditional foods of Indigenous communities in the region.

"Our traditional foods are polluted by chemicals that aren't even used here in the Arctic," says Shawna Larson, Environmental Justice Program Director for Alaska Community Action on Toxics. "The U.S. has been one of the few countries pressing to allow continued use of these products - it makes no sense, and it has to change."

The groups also submitted several statements and resolutions from Indigenous organizations in the Arctic region calling for an immediate phaseout of all uses of the pesticide lindane.

For more information

* On the Stockholm Convention: www.pops.int <<http://www.pops.int>>

* On lindane health effects and alternatives: www.panna.org/lindane <<http://www.panna.org/lindane>>

* On parents' stories for lindane-free lice control: www.panna.org/lindane/stories <<http://www.panna.org/lindane/stories>>

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