

Lack of EU action on hormone disruptors 'completely criminal'

Written by Michèle Rivasi on 27 March 2015 in Opinion
Opinion

Michèle Rivasi slams the European commission's lack of action over endocrine disrupting chemicals, saying it endangers citizens' fundamental right to health.



As an ecologist and a representative of EU citizens at the European parliament, I find the current lack of effective action in relation to endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) to be completely criminal.

These substances cause many chronic diseases, hormone-dependent cancers - such as breast and prostate cancer - obesity, genital deformities, neurological problems in children like autism and loss of IQ points. A great many studies demonstrate the evidence on this.

On Tuesday, Sophie Bordères, coordinator of pesticides action week (20-30 March), came to Brussels to take part in an action with mothers, young women, men, babies, banners and bikes outside the European commission building at Schuman. Her intention was to raise awareness of the harm to human health associated with exposure to these pesticides.

She wanted to include Brussels in her 'Tour de France' to join others in calling on the commission to officially establish criteria on endocrine disrupting chemicals. This is needed so that the EU pesticide legislation agreed in 2009 can be fully implemented and was supposed to happen by 2013.

Earlier this month, Ms Bordères - who hopes to be a mother one day - discovered that she was carrying 22 endocrine disrupting chemicals in her body. She had taken part in a study in France organised by the association, Générations Futures.

Hair samples from 28 young women in Ile de France (greater Paris) were analysed for traces of endocrine disrupting pesticides and chemicals. All the women's hair samples contained seven endocrine disrupting pesticides.

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Just last week, the international agency for research on cancer (IARC) classified some of the pesticides found in these women's bodies as probable carcinogens. One of the chemicals IARC cited was the widely used organophosphate pesticide, glyphosate, known by its brand name, Roundup.

Another study published earlier in March estimated the massive health bill associated with exposure to endocrine disrupting pesticides at €150bn per year in the European Union.

Shareholder returns > health of citizens?

Parliament passed the Westlund resolution in March 2013 calling for a definition of criteria for endocrine disrupting pesticides, which the commission was legally bound to do according to the pesticides and biocides legislation from 2009.

The Swedish government has attacked the commission because it has not honoured its commitment to define the criteria before the end of 2013.

The council of ministers and the parliament have shown their support to Sweden, because their delegated powers were not respected, and because EU citizens' fundamental right to health is endangered. More than a year after the 2013 deadline, the European commission is still failing to fulfil its duty.

Some representatives of the commission are trying to buy time as a result of pressure from the pesticides and GMOs corporations lobby. Transatlantic trade and investment partnership negotiations are ongoing and multinationals are pushing the commission against the precautionary principle, instead first looking at the economic impact that the banning of endocrine disrupting chemicals might have on their sector.

This approach - as if the harm of a chemical to human and wildlife is determined by its impact on the return of investment for shareholders of the big six pesticide and GMO corporations (BASF, Bayer, Dupont, Dow Chemical Company, Monsanto, and Syngenta) - is unscientific and scandalous.

I give my support to initiatives like pesticide action week and the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL). Very serious health and environmental injustices are occurring. We can see from the tests on hair samples of women, including some who are expecting babies, that they are carrying all these

endocrine disrupting chemicals, even if they try their best to avoid EDCs containing products. This can have serious effects on the foetus. There is real urgency for the commission to move on this issue and to protect EU citizens. Otherwise, Euroscepticism will continue to rise, as well as the cancer rates and the healthcare related costs supported by taxpayers all across the EU.

Chemical pollution is everywhere, and it stays in the ecosystems for decades if not longer. Banning from the market is not sufficient; we have to prevent dangerous chemicals from entering the market, and as a consequence, the cycle of water. As such, we urgently need scientific and horizontal criteria to define what can be on the market and what cannot.

The Greens/EFA group always prioritises European sovereignty, public interest and democracy over mere privatised financial profits. How many cancers and expressions of public mistrust is the commission willing to wait for before it starts to effectively protect the quality of life of the current and future generations?

About the author

Michèle Rivasi is a member of parliament's environment, public health and food safety committee

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