

# PRESS RELEASE – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2008

## **Pesticides Campaigner awarded Eco Woman of the Year at the *Inspirational Women of the Year Awards***

Leading pesticides campaigner Georgina Downs has won a third major award for her determined and relentless campaign against the Government over pesticides. Georgina was awarded the first ever *Inspirational Eco Woman of the Year* at the Daily Mail's Inspirational Women of the Year Awards in association with Marks and Spencer and in support of the charity Wellbeing of Women. The Awards Gala and dinner took place last night (14<sup>th</sup> May 2008) at the Millennium Hotel in Mayfair, hosted by Kirsty Young.

Georgina Downs, who runs the UK Pesticides Campaign ([www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk](http://www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk)), decided to take on the Government in early 2001 over its failure to protect people in the countryside from exposure to pesticides.

Ms. Downs' landmark Judicial Review challenge against the Government's approach and policy regarding the use of pesticides in crop-spraying was granted permission on all 3 grounds and the 5 day High Court hearing will take place this summer.

As part of the prize for also being one of the 5 national finalists for the overall Inspirational Woman of the Year award, Georgina Downs visited Number 10 today for tea with Sarah Brown, along with the 4 other finalists and their guests.

On winning the Eco Woman of the Year award Ms. Downs states, *"I feel very honoured to have won this award and I would like to thank Barbara Robinson who nominated me and the judging panel who selected me. It was 7 years ago when I was staying at a friend's house having been forced out of my own home from crop-spraying around the area that I suddenly realised that if a farmer was legally allowed to be spraying poisonous chemicals right up to the open window of any house or school, children's playground or any other occupied premises then there had to be something seriously wrong with the Government's policy and it was at that moment that I decided that I would do everything that I could to try and change the Government's policy on pesticides. However, in my complete naivety at that time on anything to do with politics I thought it would probably only take a year. Obviously I had absolutely no idea what I was taking on both from a professional point of view and from a personal one. Successive Governments have failed to protect people in the countryside from pesticides which is definitely one of the biggest public health scandals of our time and therefore I will continue to fight on until the Government stop exposing people to these chemicals."*

Since launching her campaign in early 2001, Ms. Downs has been contacted by residents from all across the UK reporting clusters of health problems in rural communities. The acute ill-health effects that are commonly reported include sore throats, burning eyes, nose, skin, blisters, headaches, dizziness, nausea and flu-type illnesses. The most

common chronic long-term illnesses and diseases reported include clusters of various cancers, leukaemia, non-Hodgkins lymphoma, neurological conditions, including Parkinson's disease and ME, asthma, allergies, along with many other medical conditions.

Ms. Downs points out that the European Commission has clearly acknowledged the health impacts of pesticides including the chronic long term effects. For example, in July 2006 the EC stated, *"Long term exposure to pesticides can lead to serious disturbances to the immune system, sexual disorders, cancers, sterility, birth defects, damage to the nervous system and genetic damage."*

(Source: [http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/06/278&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

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However, the UK Government continues to refuse to accept that pesticides can cause chronic long term effects.

Ms. Downs goes on to state, *"While it may not be possible to reverse the damage that has already been done to many people's health following exposure to pesticides, or the environmental damage, the situation will only become even more dire if radical changes in the UK are not made now. There has already been decades of Government inaction and this cannot be allowed to continue. The Government must start making the protection of public health and the environment the number one priority and not allow the industry to continue to set the agenda when it comes to pesticides."*

#### **Notes to Editors:-**

- The Awards Gala and dinner for the Daily Mail's *Inspirational Women of the Year* Awards in association with Marks and Spencer and in support of the charity Wellbeing of Women took place last night (14<sup>th</sup> May 2008) at the Millennium Hotel in Mayfair, hosted by Kirsty Young and with Rory Bremner as the guest speaker.
- Georgina Downs won the first ever Inspirational Eco Woman of the Year Award, which M&S had added as a new award in recognition of inspiring environmental work. The Inspirational Eco Woman Of The Year title is awarded to the woman believed to have made the biggest difference to green issues in her area. As the prize for winning the award Ms. Downs will receive a £1,000 donation to an environmental charity of her choice and £500 of M&S vouchers courtesy of M&S.
- Georgina Downs was also one of the 5 national finalists for the overall Inspirational Woman of the Year award and visited Number 10 today, along with the other 4 finalists, for early morning coffee/tea with Sarah Brown.
- Ms. Downs has been granted permission by a High Court Judge to Judicially Review the approach taken and policy adopted by the UK Government regarding the use of pesticides in crop-spraying. The main charge is that the UK Government has failed to protect people, particularly rural residents, from exposure to pesticides. The permission has been granted on all 3 grounds submitted and the 5 day High Court hearing will take place this summer.

- Georgina Downs runs the UK Pesticides Campaign ([www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk](http://www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk)) to highlight the risks and adverse health and environmental effects of pesticides, especially on rural residents and communities. Ms. Downs has lived next to regularly sprayed fields for over 23 years and has long-standing health problems. She was the first to identify serious fundamental flaws regarding the so-called “*bystander risk assessment*” and for the last 7 years has been campaigning for a change in the regulations and legislation governing crop spraying. This includes the call for a ban on crop-spraying near homes, schools, playgrounds, workplaces and other public areas, and for direct public access to information on the chemicals sprayed on crops. Ms. Downs has produced 2 videos “*Pesticide Exposures for People in Agricultural Areas – Part 1 Pesticides in the Air; Part 2 The Hidden Costs*” to illustrate chemical exposure and the effects on people in rural areas
- Ms. Downs’ campaign led to considerable political activity including two Government Consultation’s on crop-spraying, followed by a year long investigation by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP). The RCEP’s conclusions overturned previous Government assertions over the safety of pesticides, as the RCEP concluded that the current policy is completely inadequate.
- Georgina Downs won the prestigious Andrew Lees Memorial Award at the 2006 British Environment and Media Awards (BEMAs) and the Heroine Award at Cosmopolitan magazine’s Fun Fearless Female Awards in November 2006.

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