

PRESS RELEASE

Paying To Be Poisoned

Existing pesticide policy could be costing the country billions

A prominent pesticide campaigner has told the Government that the cost to the economy and society as a whole from the use of pesticides could be running into billions.

Georgina Downs has conducted a determined campaign to change Government Policy that has at last forced this matter into the public arena. In her “heavyweight” response to the Government’s Consultation on *Introducing No-Spray Zones around residential properties* she has pulled together all the confirmed external costs of pesticide use as well as examining other areas where pesticides have been attributed with causing widespread damage.

She states that DEFRA’s Consultation Document has focused on the negative implications for the farming industry and economics of production if no-spray zones were to be introduced and does not address the substantial health and environmental costs and devastating consequences that already exist from the use of chemicals in agriculture. These external costs include damage to human health (both acute and chronic) contamination of air, water, soil, biodiversity and impacts on the wider environment.

Ms. Downs states *“At present members of the public subsidise intensive farming at a cost of approx. £3 billion per year, but the taxpayer then has to pay again in both financial and human terms for the damage caused to their health and the wider environment. This obviously has massive economic and financial implications for all parties, with the exception of the pesticide industry.”*

Ms. Downs continues to receive emails and letters from people all over the country reporting a variety of medical conditions in communities surrounded by fields that are regularly sprayed. The most common illnesses that are being reported are clusters of cancers, (especially breast cancer among rural women) leukaemia, ME and asthma. She points out that a recent European initiative has finally acknowledged that pesticides are possibly related to immunological effects, endocrine-disrupting effects, neurotoxic disorders and cancer.

Ms. Downs calculates that the total cost to the UK with regard to cancer, ME and asthma alone is in excess of £6 billion. She says *“It is not known what proportion of the overall costs from damage to health and environment could be attributable to pesticides, however, even if only partly then the cost to the economy and society, as whole, would be substantial and run into billions.”* Ms. Downs points out that the personal and human costs to individuals suffering pesticide related ill-health cannot be calculated in financial terms.

In responding to the Consultation proposals Ms. Downs has criticised the existing regulations and monitoring system as *“totally inadequate.”*

She says that the Consultation Document seems to have centred on the problem of immediate visible spraydrift only and not the wider issue of the long-term exposures to pesticides in the air. *“This is a fundamental point in relation to the case that has been presented to the Government over the last year,”* she states, *“as pesticide particles and droplets cannot be controlled once they have been dispersed into the surrounding air, they are airborne contaminants. Pesticides in the air can travel considerable distances*

resulting in widespread toxic air pollution and studies have shown pesticide particles located miles away from where they were originally applied. Therefore a small buffer zone is not going to be adequate or in anyway acceptable to protect residents and others from the high level of risk inherent in the spraying of agricultural chemicals or prevent contamination of their land."

Ms. Downs has included with her submission studies and documentation from around the world demonstrating the dangers for people living in rural areas. She has hit back at the NFU who earlier stated that there was no justification for introducing no-spray zones and says *"It will be interesting to see if the NFU still say that after seeing the evidence in my submission."*

This evidence will include a "hard-hitting" video of cases from all over the country of people who have suffered at the hands of agriculture chemicals and Ms. Downs invites the NFU to accompany her on her travels to see the reality for themselves.

She states that the introduction of mandatory no-spray zones within a certain distance of homes, schools, workplaces and any other places of human habitation are essential and an urgent priority.

Ms. Downs says, *"These chemicals are poisons and as long as we the public are subsidising agriculture we should have some say in what it does. This is not a matter of "social acceptability" or "public perception" it is quite simply a matter of public health."*

—Notes to editors ----

- Pesticides are poisonous chemicals and are extremely hazardous to human health
- The principle aim of pesticide regulation in the UK is supposed to be the protection of public health
- There is no legal obligation for farmers to notify anyone of any intended spraying application or to supply information on the chemicals being used, regardless of whether adverse health effects have been suffered
- At the present time a crop-sprayer is legally allowed to repeatedly spray mixtures of poisonous chemicals right up to the open window of any occupied premises whether it be a resident's home, a school (nursery, infant, primary etc.) a home for the elderly or disabled or any office or workplace.
- Countless numbers of people have regularly suffered ill-health effects following exposure to these chemicals and Ms. Downs has been contacted by people from all over the country who are reporting clusters of cancers, neurological diseases and other medical conditions in communities surrounded by regularly sprayed fields
- Ms. Downs has lived next to regularly sprayed fields for 20 years. She was invited by Professor David Coggon, Chairman of the Government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides to present a paper entitled *"Why the bystander risk assessment does not equate to real-life exposure scenarios,"* for their Open Meeting on July 10th 2002. The paper and transcripts of the meeting can be found at www.pesticides.gov.uk

- Ms. Downs also produced a video illustrating chemical exposure that was also presented at the ACP meeting and is available upon request
- Ms. Downs met with Lord Whitty and Michael Meacher on December 17th 2002 to present her case for a change in the regulations and legislation governing agricultural spraying. She has called for a ban on crop-spraying and the use of pesticides near to people's homes, schools, workplaces and any other places of human habitation and for the introduction of a new legal obligation to warn people before spraying and to provide the necessary chemical information
- Ms. Downs' campaign was featured on The Food Police BBC1 March 26th; The Observer on April 13th ("*Georgina's Fight Against Toxic Peril*" and "*Can We Have a Breath of Fresh Air?*") on Farming Today BBC Radio 4 on March 25th and May 3rd; (NB. The HSE admitted on this programme that it has absolutely no idea how many people in the countryside are actually suffering from ill-health that's related to pesticides) and in various other media
- DEFRA launched a Consultation on Crop-spraying on July 21st. The DEFRA News Release and Consultation links are at: www.defra.gov.uk/news/2003/030721a.htm The Consultation Information is available at: <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/applicant/aahip/aahl0320.htm>
- Further information in relation to Ms. Downs' submission to the Government's Consultation "*Proposals for the Introduction of No-spray zones between spraying areas and residential properties in England and Wales*" is available on request

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