



Bulletin d'information sur les pesticides

No. 10 - September to November 2022

Civil society activities



USA: Scandalous high levels of PFAS in pesticides

Toxic chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) were detected in seven out of ten insecticides tested in the US. In particular, six of them contained incredibly high levels of perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), one of the most dangerous substances in the PFAS family, according to a [scientific study](#) published in the *Journal of Hazardous Materials Letters* in November 2022.

[PFAS](#) substances are a class of approximately 12,000 chemicals commonly used to make thousands of products water, stain and heat resistant. They do not break down naturally, but accumulate in humans and the environment. They are extremely persistent substances, referred to as "forever chemicals," and many studies link them to serious health problems, such as birth defects, cancer, liver disease, kidney disease, autoimmune disorders, high cholesterol and decreased immunity.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had [highlighted](#) that fluorinated high-density polyethylene (HDPE) containers contained PFAS, which can migrate into pesticides, but this recent study reveals that the type of PFAS found is

different from those leached from the plastic containers, and that the level of PFAS is several orders of magnitude higher, suggesting that the chemicals are coming from a different source.

The reason for the presence of PFOS in insecticides is not clear. [According to EPA](#), there are no active or inert pesticide ingredients with structures similar to important PFASs such as PFOS. It could be the result of the illegal addition of this compound by chemical companies. It is not clear what PFASs may be used for in insecticides, it is thought that they may be used as a dispersing agent, to help the pesticide spread evenly.

Indeed, the six PFAS-containing pesticides have PFOS levels ranging from 4 to 19 mg/kg (ppt), while the EPA's health advisory for PFOS in drinking water is 0.02 mg/kg. Although the EPA has not set limits for PFOS in pesticides, such a low level in water suggests that no exposure to the compound is safe. PFAS in pesticides can be taken up by crops. These high levels in pesticides pose a health risk if they are released into fields where food crops are grown.

Added as "inert ingredients" to pesticide formulations, manufacturers are not required to list the presence of PFOS on product labels, unlike so-called active ingredients, which are required to be listed.

In September 2022, the EPA [proposed](#) to end the use of twelve PFASs from the list of permitted inert ingredients, leaving [7 à 8 PFASs](#) still legally usable by companies in pesticide formulations.

If you have made it this far, can you make one more small effort to allow us to continue this work of investigation and information to help the victims of pesticides?

Justice Pesticides needs you.

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