

MEDIA RELEASE

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Toxic chemicals used in lice treatments, flame retardants, stain and water resistance, and old pesticides targeted for global elimination under UN Agreement:

Canada urged to support findings from international experts to eliminate toxic chemicals detected in Canada's Arctic

Toronto – Chemicals used in treating head lice, an additive in flame retardants, chemicals to provide stain and grease resistant properties to various consumer products, and pesticides that have long been out of production will be targeted for global elimination at an upcoming United Nations meeting on persistent organic pollutants (POPs). These POPs have been detected far and wide in the Canadian environment, including the Great Lakes and the Arctic.

Based on the work of the POPs Review Committee, a subsidiary body of experts established under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), nine POPs have been recommended for elimination under the Stockholm Convention. Canada, along with the other 162 Parties to the Stockholm Convention on POPs, will be called on to take global action to eliminate these POPs. The UN meeting is the first opportunity to strengthen the Stockholm Convention by expanding the list of toxic chemicals targeted for elimination.

“Canada’s support for elimination of the nine POPs as recommended by the international expert committee is essential for a successful UN meeting,” states Fe de Leon, researcher at the Canadian Environmental Law Association. “We have reached a pivotal point in the life of this Convention. We hope to see Canada show its leadership on POPs once again and seek global elimination of POPs. This will send a clear signal to the world of our government’s commitment to protect Canadians and our environment, particularly the Arctic, from POPs.”

Environmental and health groups from across Canada submitted a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper urging support for elimination of the nine POPs at the UN meeting.

Pentabromodiphenyl ether (Penta BDE);	Octabromodiphenyl ether (OctaBDE)	Hexabromobiphenyl (HBB)
Lindane	Alpha hexachlorocyclohexane (Alpha HCH);	Beta hexachlorocyclohexane (Beta HCH)
Perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS)	Chlordecone	Pentachlorobenzene (PeCB)

The Stockholm Convention on POPs is an international agreement that outlines global action on persistent organic pollutants (POPs), which are known to stay in the environment for a long time (persistent), accumulate in people and other living things (bioaccumulate), travel long distances from their original source (long range transport) and which are highly toxic to wildlife and human health. Adverse health effects include birth defects, cancer, immune, development, and reproductive system dysfunction, learning disabilities, and infertility.

“We know that Canada is vulnerable to the impacts of POPs. We are well positioned to call for a global elimination on these POPs,” states Delores Broten of Reach for Unbleached, a pulp pollution watchdog organization in British Columbia. “We have taken the steps through regulations to restrict and ban most of the POPs. With the availability of safe alternatives, there shouldn’t be any doubt about our support for elimination.”

Currently the Stockholm Convention targets the “dirty dozen chemicals” such as DDT, PCBs, dioxins, hexachlorobenzene and mirex. “The addition of the nine new POPs for elimination under the Stockholm Convention will be a reaffirmation of global commitment to fight pollution,” states Gideon Forman, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. “The use of POPs like lindane for treating lice should be stopped because of their known impacts to children’s health and the availability of alternatives. Anything less than an elimination strategy will mean POPs deposition in Canada will continue.”

“Thousands of Canadians have read our publication, the CancerSmart Consumer Guide, and were shocked to realize that many POPs, such as fire retardant PBDEs and the head lice treatment lindane were still in use in Canada,” said Sean Griffin of Toxic Free Canada. “Now that Health and Environment Canada are introducing regulations to control their use in Canada, the government’s next step must be to support the POPs Review Committee’s recommendation to eliminate these chemicals.”

“Once released into the environment, it is not easy to predict what harm chemicals can cause. I have seen first hand that exposure to these chemicals may have long lasting health impacts such as disabling symptoms and chronic chemical sensitivity,” states Michel Gaudet, Rohini Peris, Association pour la santé environnemental du Québec. “There are resources or agencies that cannot adequately deal with the challenges faced by victims. That is why a call for global action is urgently needed on these POPs.”

“IPEN believes that all nine substances recommended by the POPs Review Committee should be eliminated by adding them to Annex A of the Convention. Canada has played a crucial role in taking steps towards elimination of toxic substances and in supporting countries around the world in their work on chemicals. Canada’s leadership is critical for other Parties to meet their commitments to eliminate POPs,” said Olga Speranskaya of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN).

Canada was the first country to sign and ratify the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants in 2001. The Parties to the Stockholm Convention are set to meet in Geneva, Switzerland on May 4-8, 2009.

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