



Press Release: Children, Health, Environment, European Union, European Legislation

## European's children's brains and reproductive organs at risk from hazardous chemicals, if European Parliament does not improve proposed legislation on Pesticides, Toys and Cosmetics.

Brussels/Utrecht/Munich, October 8, 2008 - **Professor Philippe Grandjean, adjunct professor of Environmental Health at Harvard University and expert on children's environmental health, said, at an event organised by WECF – Women in Europe for a Common Future - at the European Parliament, "Children should not be ingesting food containing neurotoxic pesticides". Many pesticides are made specifically to destroy insects' nervous systems. Unfortunately, humans have biochemistry very similar to insects. This makes human brain development sensitive to the pesticides, and the consequences are serious in this age of technology, where we - and future generations - must rely on optimal brain functions. When something goes wrong in the child's brain development, it is damaged forever; you do not get a second chance to build a brain", according to Grandjean.**

### ***We should not risk the brains of our children***

WECF organised an expert meeting yesterday at the European Parliament, to highlight latest science on the connection between children's health problems and chemicals found in children's food and products, as European parliamentarians are preparing to vote on a revision of the Pesticide Directive, the Food Directive and the Toys Safety Directive. Professor Grandjean said that "it is also a question of ethics. If I asked my Medical Ethics Committee, and requested to experiment with neurotoxic pesticides on pregnant women and children, they would of course refuse. They would not allow a risk to affect the brain development of the child. How come that politicians accept such an experiment on all the population? We should not risk the brains of our children".

#### **Testes are important as well**

Professor Niels Skakkebaek, specialized in environmental aspects of male reproductive disorders, at the University Hospital, Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen, Denmark, added "not only the brain is important, testes are also important, and with 400% increases in testicular cancer, as we see in my country, politicians should be very worried, as the basis for testicular cancer is laid when the baby boy is in the mother's womb; this increase can only be explained by environmental causes".

Dorette Corbey, the Member of the European Parliament hosting the session, responded that "agro-industry was arguing that 80% or 90% of agricultural production would be lost if neurotoxins would no longer be allowed in pesticides, and that many members of parliament were scared about the prospects presented by industry, and unsure about the scope of health damage to children caused by neurotoxic pesticides".

#### **Alternatives exist**

Sascha Gabizon, executive director of WECF, stated that industry's arguments were difficult to believe, seen the fact that alternatives exist and that even the Food and Agriculture Organisation has stated that organic farming, without pesticides, can feed the world just as well as conventional farming with pesticides.

Professor Grandjean confirmed that "we see is a world-wide pandemic, the child population in the world is affected by over 200 neurotoxins in their direct environment, many of them being pesticides.

Perhaps as many as one out of six children's brain development have been adversely affected, in part by neurotoxins, as a scientific report in the Lancet already showed in November 2006. Testing for neurotoxins is a necessity, in pesticides as well as in other consumer products."

Bjoern Hansen of the European Commission indicated that the current chemicals legislation does not request testing on neurotoxins, as the testing methods were not yet well developed.

Professor Grandjean countered that this is no longer the situation, as the OECD has developed a test protocol for neurotoxicity during development, and that there exists new cell-based laboratory tests, which no longer require live animals to be used, and which are also less expensive.

### **Pregnant women at risk**

Sascha Gabizon, executive director of WECF added that for parents it is "unacceptable to have to wait many years until the European Commission has agreed to require neurotoxicity testing, whereas all children born today are at risk of having retarded brain development or later in life cancers, from contaminants their mothers are not even aware of they are being exposed to and passing on to the child in their womb. We want that European Parliamentarians take their responsibility and protect our children now, by making sure neurotoxins and endocrine disruptors are not allowed to be in children's food, toys and bodycare products".

Professor Skakkebaek confirmed that "when women are pregnant, and they put on body lotions and facial crèmes in the morning, which often contain phthalates, then these phthalates will go straight into her bloodstream, and peak at lunch, and remain in the blood till they apply a next layer the next day". In this way, pregnant women unintentionally continuously expose their unborn babies to a chemical, which in animal experiments damage testicular development.

Sascha Gabizon showed a doll which she had bought for her daughter, and which according to a test carried out by the German testing organisation "Ökotest" contained a phthalate called "diisononylcyclohexan-1,2 - dicarboxylat", which according to its chemical structure, resembles other hormone disrupting chemicals; "if I understand the professors well, just by touching this doll, phthalates can enter my skin and go into the bloodstream, and can cause a deformation of the penis if I were pregnant of a boy?"

### **Phthalates in toys**

Prof. Skakkebaek agreed that by touching a toy with phthalates, some of these phthalates can enter into the mother's bloodstream through the skin. He explained "we cannot prove the direct link from one specific chemical to testicular cancer, but we do have a lot of evidence, for example, there is an association between higher levels of phthalates in the mother's breast milk and lower levels of testosterone in her baby boy. We also see an association between higher levels of brominated flame retardants in the breast milk, and undescended testicles when the baby is born. The same association we see with pesticides".

**In regard to banning chemicals, Professor Grandjean recommended the European Parliamentarians "to add the E of Endocrine Disrupting, and the N of Neurotoxic to the CMR of Carcinogenic, Mutagenic and Reprotoxic, CMREN; they should all be substituted - especially in a product like cosmetics, there should be no need for any neurotoxins; cosmetics are supposed to make you pretty, not stupid".**

---

### **Information for the press:**

More information on WECF's point of view on this subject and a report of the meeting can be found at <http://www.wecf.eu/english/articles/2008/10/safe-environmentchildren.php>

- Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director WECF, + 49-1728637586
- Chantal van den Bossche, Press Officer WECF, +31-6 2812 9992, [chantal.vandenbossche @wecf.eu](mailto:chantal.vandenbossche@wecf.eu)
- Women in Europe, +31 30 2310300, [wecf@wecf.eu](mailto:wecf@wecf.eu), [www.wecf.eu](http://www.wecf.eu)

