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Commission close to completion of pesticide review: 110 additional substances to be withdrawn

A further 110 substances used in plant protection products (PPPs) – including insecticides, fungicides and herbicides – are to be withdrawn from the market by December 2003 as part of the European Commission's new approach to the evaluation of active substances in plant protection products. These 110 substances are in addition to the 320 that have to be withdrawn from the market in July 2003.

David Byrne, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, said: "Our aim in removing certain substances from the market is to ensure that products in use are safe for both the environment and human health. Completing the harmonisation of active substances allowed in pesticides is an important step towards ensuring that consumers throughout the EU are equally protected."

The current approach requires manufacturers to "defend" plant protection products, proving that their products reach the required safety standards. Most of the products to be withdrawn will be as a result of manufacturers declining to defend their products for economic or other reasons. To defend substances, the manufacturers had to notify their commitment to submit complete data packages to the designated authorities in the Member States and to the European Food Safety Authority. Defended substances may continue to be authorised until such time as the evaluations are complete and a decision is taken as regards the safety status of the product in question.

As a result of this new approach a decision was already taken in July 2002 to withdraw 320 substances from the market in July 2003. Now the Commission has proposed to withdraw another 110 substances by December 2003.

A few temporary derogations will apply in some Member States for some "essential uses". This is for products that are not defended by the manufacturer, but for which there is no readily available alternative for the crops in question and no safety concerns linked to their continued restricted and time-limited use.

Including the 320 already withdrawn, the 110 additional substances and approximately 20 substances that have been individually evaluated with negative decisions, the Commission has now decided to withdraw about 450 active substances. This represents a decrease in 2003 of more than 50% of all the substances that were on the market in 1993. The Commission aims to take decisions on all defended substances before the end of 2008, thus completing the harmonisation of active substances allowed in pesticides in the EU.

Users should check authorisation status

Users, wholesalers and retailers of plant protection products will need to be aware of whether the products they use or sell are likely to be withdrawn, so as to prevent them being left with stocks of unusable material. Those concerned should contact their national authority to check the authorisation status for any particular product.

Background – Directive 91/414

Directive 91/414 on the authorisation, use and control of plant protection products – insecticides, fungicides, herbicides etc. – was adopted in 1991. It sets up a harmonised authorisation system for the active substances used in plant protection products at EU level. Member States may then approve products containing such EU agreed substances for use on their territory. The 1991 rules make EU authorisations of active substances subject to a positive outcome of safety evaluations, for which producers must present data.

At the time of adoption of Council Directive 91/414/EEC in 1991, there were over 850 such substances authorised for use in the Member States.

The Commission highlights that there are measures already in place to ensure that the active substances currently in use are monitored with a view to identifying levels in excess of the maximum residue limits (MRLs). This allows Member States to take necessary corrective actions to ensure the safe use of the plant protection products and thus to ensure that there is no risk to health.