Methyl parathion is officially banned or restricted in Cambodia, China, the US, Japan, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. (See the links below for an example of a Methyl parathion disaster in USA, 1996 which cost $50 million.) The situation is some Asian countries, however, is that the chemical is widely used on a frequent basis. Folidol, the Bayer brand name for methyl parathion, is perhaps the most popular insecticide on the Cambodian market. Cambodia has over 50 kinds of dangerous pesticides: organophosphorous compounds such as methyl parathion, mevinphos, methamidophos and monocrotophos are being illegally exported to Cambodia through Thailand and Vietnam. Cambodia serves as a dumping ground for products that cannot be sold in its neighbouring countries. The multinational firms that manufacture the chemicals say that they are not responsible because they do not directly market to Cambodia. Methamidophos, which according to WHO is category Ia, can be fatal if swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Manufactured by Bayer and marketed as Monitor, methamidophos is a restricted chemical in the US and New Zealand but it manages to be another favourite of Cambodian farmers.

The pesticide industry should be held responsible not only for their exports, but also for the way their products are used. Chemical companies say that it is not their responsibility if there are lax safety conditions in the countries that use their products. The multinationals blame smaller regional producers making generic versions of their products with little to no safety training and also resellers who smuggle products over the border from Thailand. While officials and corporations argue about who is responsible, pesticides continue to flow, poisoning millions of farmers, their families and their environment.

Negative Impacts of Pesticides

The misuse of pesticides, particularly on rice crops, has caused huge pest outbreak as the chemicals not only kill the pests, but beneficial insects as well. The insecticides do not always kill the eggs of the pests, however, so they are able to emerge and reproduce without any hindrance from predators. Incessant spraying, causing pest resistance to particular chemicals, has led to an estimated over-dosing in rice by up to 8 times the recommended rate. Much of the research in tropical rice cultivation supports the idea that insecticides are really unnecessary. It has also been stated that over 50% of all pesticides used for global crop protection can be suppressed without significant consequence on world food production.

In relation to human health, while most of the reported ill effects are acute cases of pesticide poisoning, chronic long-term effects such as cancer and endocrine disruption are of increasing concern. Various kinds of water supplies become contaminated with pesticides, not only impacting on the safety of drinking water, but also killing aquatic life and birds, and other animals which survive on these water sources. (For more information, see fact sheet on Pesticides and Poisoning).

Industry Response

Major manufacturers say they try very hard to encourage responsible use of the chemicals; they call it 'product stewardship'. There have so far been a number of global industry initiatives including the Safe Use Campaign and the Responsible Care Initiative. Both aim to raise standards of understanding and practice throughout the distribution chain, from production through to disposal. However, the highly toxic nature of some of the chemicals and the conditions for users in developing countries renders both of these initiatives inadequate. If international efforts to control pesticides are to have a significant impact then governments will need to start agreeing on targets and strategies to reduce pesticide use and to invest in sustainable pest control methods like IPM.

Further Information

Web Sites

- The site of the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) includes a report of the 1996 methyl parathion disaster in Mississippi: www.igc.org/panna/resources/_pestis/PESTIS.1997.10.html
- Pesticide Action Network Asian and Pacific www.poptel.org.uk/panap/
- The World Wildlife Fund has a Global Toxics Initiative. The website includes general information about agricultural pollution:. www.worldwildlife.org/
- The site of the Asia Pacific Crop Protection Association www.apcpa.org

Video Tape

- 'Toxic Trail', 2001, produced by TVE for BBC, copies available for educational purposes on request from the FAO Community IPM Programme
- 'Made in Denmark', 1997, produced by TV94 for the Global Labour Summit , focuses on Cheminova, another producer of Methyl parathion.

Sample Documents

- Lorring, D, Struggling to Keep Cambodia off the Pesticide Treadmill Global Pesticide Campaigner, Vol 5, No. 4, December 1995

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