



## Safety first for pesticides

**The Environment Committee voted on Wednesday on new legislation governing the production, licensing and use of pesticides. MEPs confirmed that certain toxic chemicals will be banned, except where there is a serious danger to plant health. They also argued that the EU should not be divided into three pesticide licensing zones. In addition, Member States will have to meet quantitative targets for reducing the volume of pesticides used.**

The committee was voting on two second-reading recommendations. Following compromises between the political groups, the committee adopted both reports by large majorities. Negotiations will take place with Council on a number of points before the plenary vote in Parliament in December or January.

### **No to dangerous chemicals in pesticides**

The report by Hiltrud Breyer (Greens/EFA, DE) on the regulation on the authorisation of plant protection products was adopted by 39 votes to 20 with 6 abstentions. Under this regulation a positive list of approved "active substances" (the chemical ingredients of pesticides) is to be drawn up at EU level. Pesticides will then be licensed at national level on the basis of this list.

### **Highly toxic chemicals banned**

The committee confirmed Parliament's wish to ban certain highly toxic chemicals, namely those which are endocrine-disrupting (i.e. which affect hormones), genotoxic, carcinogenic or toxic to reproduction. It added developmental neurotoxic and immunotoxic substances to the banned list where they pose a significant risk. However, if a substance is needed to combat a serious danger to plant health, it may be approved for up to four years even if it does not meet these safety criteria.

The European Commission has rejected widely publicised claims that the tough new rules on pesticides would cause a large number of pesticides to be removed from the market, thereby seriously affecting farmers and food prices. It argues that only 4% of substances would disappear because they are endocrine disruptors and only 2% because they are carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic to reproduction.

### **Safer alternatives where possible**

Chemicals will be approved at EU level for differing periods of time, depending on their toxicity. Products containing certain hazardous substances ("candidates for substitution") are to be replaced if safer alternatives are shown to exist. MEPs voted to speed up this process, cutting the maximum replacement deadline from five years to two. The overall aim is to encourage the use of the less toxic substances or of non-chemical alternatives.

### **MEPs stand firm against a three-zone EU**

For the purpose of licensing pesticide products, the Commission and Council wish to divide the EU into three zones (north, centre and south), with mutual recognition by Member States within each zone. MEPs rejected this idea, as they had at first reading, opting instead for a single EU-wide zone, although individual States would be allowed to ban pesticides if they can substantiate their case, for example on grounds of local environmental conditions.

## **Ambitious targets for reducing pesticide use**

The report by Christa Kläß (EPP-ED, DE) on the directive on the sustainable use of pesticides was adopted by 58 votes to 3 with 2 abstentions.

MEPs adopted a crucial compromise amendment stating that National Action Plans for reducing the volume of pesticides used should include quantitative targets. For "active substances of very high concern" and those classified as "toxic or very toxic", the target will be "a minimum 50% reduction".

## **Crop spraying, rivers, lakes and parks**

The directive already states that aerial crop spraying will in general be banned, albeit with exceptions subject to approval by the authorities. The Council wants to allow Member States to lay down that if the authorities do not respond within a set time to an application to spray, the application is deemed approved ("tacit consent"). The Environment Committee today rejected this idea by a narrow majority. It also decided that Member States may demand that neighbours be informed in advance if spraying is to take place.

To protect bodies of water from pesticides, the Council believes Member States should simply take "appropriate measures". MEPs today restored their first-reading demand for "buffer zones" around water courses and even tougher measures where drinking water sources are concerned. They add that Member States would be allowed to establish pesticide-free zones that cover the entire Member State.

Lastly, regarding areas where pesticide use must be kept to a minimum, such as parks and playgrounds, the committee reinstated the EP's demand for public healthcare facilities such as hospitals to be included and for "substantial no-spray zones" to be established around all these protected areas.

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