



Lindane, Community Health and Human Rights

"States shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent."

--- Article 29, para. 2

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



What is Lindane?



Lindane is a highly toxic organochlorine-based pesticide. It has been on Pesticide Action Network International's "Dirty Dozen" list of dangerous pesticides since the early 1980s, and has been banned in more than 50 countries around the world. Lindane is a Persistent Organic Pollutant ("POP") which, like DDT and other POPs, accumulates in the food chain and the bodies of animals and humans, creating serious health impacts. These include cancers, neurological damage and birth defects. Young children suffer the most serious affects of exposure to POPs.

Lindane has been used for decades in agriculture (for seed treatment), animal care (for ticks and other external parasites) and, most alarmingly, in shampoos and skin lotions used on humans, mainly children, for eradication of head lice and scabies.

In addition to its effects on children and others who are directly exposed, lindane threatens the health and livelihood of communities in the Arctic where it is transported via wind and ocean currents. Lindane and its isomers, such as beta-HCH, are the most common contaminants found in the Arctic environment. They accumulate in Arctic food sources, impacting subsistence rights, and are found in elevated levels in the blood and breast milk of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic region.

In addition to the impacts on human health, lindane is highly contaminating and persists indefinitely in the environment. Lindane production is an exceptionally dirty process, creating 9-12 tons of toxic waste for every ton of lindane produced. **A single treatment for head lice or scabies contains enough lindane to pollute six million gallons of water!** In 2002, lindane use was banned in State of California after widespread water contamination was detected in the Los Angeles area.

All uses of lindane have been banned in the US EXCEPT pharmaceutical use on humans. The most recent data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control found beta-HCH in the blood of more than half of the subjects sampled, with the highest levels found among women of childbearing age. Other studies have documented lindane isomers in human blood and breast milk as well as food sources around the world.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ❖ Find out if lindane-based lice and scabies treatments are being distributed for use on humans (pharmaceutical use) by your village, tribal or public health clinic, or in local day care centers or schools. If so, protest!
- ❖ Let other families, parents, teachers, health workers and tribal officials know the dangers of lindane;
- ❖ Know and assert your human rights, including the right to free, prior and informed consent;
- ❖ Learn about non-toxic, herbal and alternative ways to get rid of lice and scabies, including traditional knowledge-based methods;
- ❖ Write to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and demand the immediate and complete elimination of lindane pharmaceutical products;
- ❖ Support the addition of lindane as one of five additional chemicals currently being considered by the Scientific Review Committee for an international phase-out under the United Nations Stockholm Convention (“POPs Treaty”).

A phase-out of lindane in North America is long overdue. The U.S. must take immediate action and join with other countries around the world to ban this dangerous pesticide!

For more information or to report the distribution of lindane-based products in your community, contact: Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) (907) 222-7714, shawna@akaction.org; International Indian Treaty Council Alaska Office (907) 745-4482, andrea@treatycouncil.org; or the North-South Indigenous Network Against Pesticides, sara@treatycouncil.org.

