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## PANNA: WHO reconsiders DDT, Dow's Bhopal memo scandal, "Veggie Libel" bill defeated, Rachel Carson Post Office, and more

### Pesticide Action Network Updates Service (PANUPS)

*A Weekly News Update on Pesticides, Health and Alternatives*

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**WHO reconsiders DDT, Dow's Bhopal memo scandal, "Veggie Libel" bill defeated, Rachel Carson Post Office, and more**

May 3, 2007

**WHO confirms commitment to DDT phase-out under Stockholm Convention.** During the Third Conference of Parties to the Stockholm Convention (POPs Treaty) this week in Senegal, the Director of the World Health Organization Office on Public Health and Environment, Dr. Maria Neira, stated categorically that WHO strongly supports the Convention and is committed to reducing reliance on DDT in malaria control. Addressing a large audience of government officials at a joint WHO/UNEP workshop in Senegal entitled "Reducing Reliance on DDT While Strengthening Malaria Control," Dr. Neira affirmed the WHO goal to reduce and eventually eliminate use of DDT, in accordance with the Convention. She stressed that this has been the case since the Convention came into existence, and the WHO position on DDT has not changed since then. Civil society groups including PAN and the International POPs Elimination Network pointed out that DDT advocates have been using WHO's [September 2006 announcement](#) giving DDT's use for indoor residual spraying a "clean bill of health" to support increased reliance on DDT for malaria control. WHO officials promised to address this perception as soon as possible.  
[Read more.](#)

**Dow shareholders question Bhopal memo.** Amnesty International has called for a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investigation of Dow Chemical Co. after the disclosure of an internal company memo exposing Dow's effort to absolve its liabilities from the deadly 1984 Union Carbide pesticide plant explosion in Bhopal, India that has killed more than 22,000 people to date. Dow purchased Union Carbide in 2001. In a [November 8, 2006 letter](#), Dow officials suggested that India create an "appropriate investment climate" by dropping its demand that Dow provide a \$22 million deposit towards the Bhopal cleanup. [Sanford Lewis](#), an attorney representing Amnesty and the New York City Pension Funds, a major Dow shareholder, accused the company of "attempting to bypass the Indian courts... by pressuring the executive branch." Amnesty's Amy O'Meara suggests "Dow's refusal to address the human rights of the Bhopal survivors may be having a serious, but undisclosed, financial impact" and notes that the "apparent attempts to avoid liability coincide with multiple rumors about a possible Dow buy-out." PAN and other members of the Dow Accountability Network are supporting Amnesty's resolution on responsibility for Bhopal to be presented at Dow's annual shareholders meeting on May 11.

**EPA urged to adopt "Precautionary Principle."** On April 17, MIT professor Nicholas Ashford and other experts told a National Academy of Sciences panel that the EPA should adopt "European-style safeguards" for chemicals. These safeguards would include the "Precautionary Principle," which shifts the burden of proof to manufacturers who must show that new substances and technologies are safe before they are allowed on the market. Ashford (a former chair of the National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety & Health) called for improved testing methods and advised the EPA to "look at Europe and find out what's happening." Instead of considering the risk to single individuals, Ashford advised regulators to examine "potential risks to whole communities." While the U.S. Toxics Release Inventory sets no limits on exposures to harmful substances, Ashford praised Massachusetts and New Jersey for passing state laws to hold polluters accountable.

**Rachel Carson Post Office meets opposition.** Pennsylvania Representative [Jason Altmire](#) (D-PA) has proposed naming a Springdale, PA, Post Office to honor native Rachel Carson, author of the seminal environmental book, *Silent Spring*. H.R. 1434 has moved on to the Senate for consideration in hopes that the Rachel Carson Post Office can be approved by May 27, the 100th anniversary of Carson's birth. Renaming a post office seldom makes headlines beyond local papers but, in this case, [53 House Republicans](#) voted against honoring "the Mother of the Environmental Movement." A total of 117 Republicans joined a united Democratic coalition to support the bill.

**California to reduce risks from two fumigants.** The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) plans to impose [new restrictions](#) on two pesticide fumigants to reduce exposures to toxic drift. [Metam-sodium](#) and [metam-potassium](#), two pre-plant fumigants, generate volatile gases that can irritate the eyes and lungs. In 2005, 15 million pounds of the two chemicals were used on California fields. The new controls under consideration would extend buffer zones up to one-half-mile, require prior notification for schools, homes, hospitals and farmworker housing and mandate warning signs in both English and Spanish in neighboring fields. DPR Director Mary-Ann Warmerdam said the decision was taken to "reinforce our 'zero-tolerance' policy for pesticide injuries." A public comment session is set for May 30; [written comments](#) will be accepted until June 30.

**"Veggie Libel" bill battle in Sacramento.** On April 11, the California Assembly Agriculture Committee approved [AB 698](#), a so-called "veggie libel" bill that would open food-safety watchdogs to costly lawsuits. Similar bills were rejected in 1995 and 1997. The [National Coalition Against Censorship](#) and 10 other free-speech organizations, supported by PAN and many other environmental health and justice groups, joined in opposing the bill. The [American Civil Liberties Union](#) noted that such laws are "descendants of criminal sedition laws, which made it a crime to criticize public officials." [Beyond Pesticides](#) complained that the bill would "stifle freedom of speech" and suppress information about "hazards associated with pesticides." The American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression observed that *Silent Spring* might never have been written if Rachel Carson "had confronted laws like AB 698." On May 1, the Democrats on the Assembly Judiciary Committee defeated AB 698 by a vote of 7-2.

**New organic herbicide debuts.** Organic farmers in most Western U.S. states will be first to try GreenMatch™ this spring, a new organic

weed-killer that uses d-limonene (a citrus extract) to "burn" weeds by stripping the wax from their leaves. "Weeds are the largest cost to organic farming and the primary reason why many conventional farmers don't transition fully to organic practices," says Pam Marrone, of [Marrone Organic Innovations](#), the company that has licensed the product for sales in the U.S., Canada and Latin America. GreenMatch was created by Cutting Edge Formulations, a Georgia company that also sells the product as "Nature's Avenger Organic Herbicide." Marrone says GreenMatch offers an affordable alternative to "hand-weeding, propane flaming, [and] mowing" and provides better results for less cost than "vinegar, soap and oil-based products." Approval to sell GreenMatch in California is pending.

**Pesticide suspected in global decline of bees.** The Apiary Inspectors of America reports that more than 25% of the country's bee colonies -- 2.4 million hives -- have been lost to a mysterious malady called Collapsing Colony Syndrome. The *New York Times* reports that similar die-offs are sweeping Guatemala, Brazil and Europe. Pennsylvania State University insect toxicologist Chris Mullin is screening dead bees for traces of 117 chemicals including neonicotinoids. [Imidacloprid](#), a neonicotinoid sold in the U.S. and Europe under the brand name Gaucho, was banned in France in 1999 after it was blamed for an outbreak of "mad bee disease." Gaucho's manufacturer, [Bayer CropScience](#), claims the pesticide is not harmful to bees but independent French researchers concluded that the danger was real. Dr. Mullen believes neonicotinoids are "the number-one suspect" in the bee deaths. Results of the toxicology screening are expected sometime in May.

**No more organic coffee?** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program wants to require annual inspections of all farms seeking certification as "organic." Under current standards, only 20% of the farms are inspected in any given year. According to [Salon](#), this ruling favors larger farms and plantations because the lack of inspectors and added costs would make it impossible for thousands of small growers and cooperatives to afford to continue growing organic coffee, bananas, sugar, cocoa, spices, vegetables and herbs. Because organic shade-grown coffee must be tended by hand in small plots, [TransFair USA](#) warns the ruling "could wipe out the organic coffee market in the U.S." The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture and the Rural Advancement Foundation International have called on the USDA to reconsider the [ruling](#).

**Harkening to a wiser Earth.** Entrepreneur, author and social activist Paul Hawken has written a new book on the global movement for environmental and social justice called *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming*. Hawken has also launched a companion Web site called [WISER Earth](#) (World Index of Socially and Environmentally Responsible Organizations) that has been hailed as "the first open source network for global social change." WISER Earth contains an ever expanding list of hundreds of thousands of organizations from every continent and it will be updated daily by activists around the world. WISER Earth officially launches in May.

PANUPS is a weekly email news service providing resource guides and reporting on pesticide issues that don't always get coverage by the mainstream media. It's produced by Pesticide Action Network North America, a non-profit and non-governmental organization working to advance sustainable alternatives to pesticides worldwide.

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