

About the International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides

Pesticide poisonings and harm to human health and the environment as well as economic and social disadvantages are major continuing problems found the world over from pesticide usage, especially in developing countries. We highly welcome the FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides as it can contribute to the implementation of less hazardous pest management systems.

The revised 2002 FAO Code of Conduct strengthens the obligations on governments and the pesticide industry, and calls on a wide range of parties to address pesticide problems. The Code of Conduct now includes:

- Greater emphasis on reducing risks and hazards, including a strong warning against the availability of extremely and highly toxic and hazardous products (WHO classes Ia and Ib) in developing countries
- Explicit recognition of the importance of addressing environmental risks in addition to health, with a call for monitoring of pesticide residues in food and the environment, protection of biodiversity, and minimizing the adverse effects of pesticides in the water, soil, air and on non-target organisms
- Support for Integrated Pest Management (IPM) that emphasises growth of a healthy crop, with least disruption to agro-ecosystems, and encourages natural pest controls
- Stronger requirements on protective equipment for tropical areas, and for improved application technology
- Introduction of collection systems for empty pesticide containers
- Request for commodity and food industry groups to influence agricultural practices
- Application of the life-cycle concept involving product stewardship strategies that address field level impacts

However, there are still significant shortcomings in the Code of Conduct as there are no, or limited, recommendations on:

- Implementation of detailed monitoring systems on the kind and amount of pesticides marketed nationally, imported, exported and used reported on annually
- Implementation of detailed monitoring systems on the fate of pesticides in food, water, soil, air and living beings (body burdens) reported on annually
- Implementation of the substitution principle in the pesticide registration process to ensure only the least toxic options are available, and including not only chemicals, but also all pest management options
- Implementation of the precautionary principle
- Implementation of the “polluter pays” principle
- Implementation of national pesticide use reduction programmes with clear targets, timeframes and indicators involving all stakeholders with an interest in policies that

address pesticides, agriculture, workers, consumers and environment (see note above)

- Comprehensive support for sustainable agricultural production systems which are not dependent of chemical plant protection
- Not to use genetically engineered crops that are herbicide tolerant or insect resistant, as this technology will exchange one high risk approach for another.

We emphasise that the objectives of the Code of Conduct are important, but limited. The Code of Conduct aims for “benefits to be derived from the necessary and acceptable use of pesticides ... [to be] ... achieved without significant adverse effects on human health or the environment” (Article 1.3). Five decades of pesticide-dependent intensive agricultural production systems, have resulted in untold damage to the environment, biodiversity, and human health and a fundamental change of plant protection policies is now essential.

Our vision goes beyond the Code of Conduct. There is overwhelming evidence that chemically intensive plant protection systems can be replaced by less hazardous and less economically expensive and socially disturbing systems. Taking this into account we will continue to lobby for further strengthening the Code of Conduct, and elevation of its status as a legally-binding instrument.

We strongly support full implementation of the current Code of Conduct to help solve some of the major problems. Its comprehensive implementation could make a real difference to the majority of the world’s population: women and men farmers and agricultural workers, especially in developing countries, who are daily exposed to pesticides.

The FAO Code of Conduct is recognized as the globally accepted standard for pesticide management, upon which many countries base their pesticide laws. Its influence indicates the importance of adopting the Code of Conduct as a matter of urgency. We call on all parties addressed to ensure that this instrument is widely recognised and its recommendations are implemented throughout the life cycle of all pesticides.

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