

'The Toxic Poster Child of Europe' ... Pesticides

The UK's controversial pesticide policies have resulted in 36 toxic chemicals banned in the EU being allowed by the government post-Brexit.

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The UK is falling even further behind Europe in its efforts to remove chemicals harmful to both human health and the environment from the market.

There are presently 36 pesticides – including 13 categorised as highly hazardous – authorised for use in the UK that are prohibited in EU nations, according to [a study by Pesticide Action Network UK](#) (PAN UK).

This group includes four pesticides that pose a high toxicity risk to bees, one that contaminates water, and another that is highly toxic to aquatic organisms. The UK will [continue to employ these 13 hazardous pesticides](#) for an additional two to five years compared to EU nations.

Protect

Nick Mole, policy officer at PAN UK, said:

"The UK is becoming the toxic poster child of Europe. The government has repeatedly promised that our environmental standards won't slip post-Brexit. And yet here we are, less than four years later, and already we're seeing our standards fall far behind those of the EU.

"With UK bees and other pollinators in decline, and our waters never more polluted, now is the time to be taking steps to protect nature. Instead, the government is choosing to expose British wildlife to an ever-more toxic soup of chemicals."

Additionally, PAN UK's study unveiled an increasing concern for human health, displayed by the following list of 36 pesticides permitted in the UK, but prohibited in the EU.

Permitted Pesticides

- 12 are classified as carcinogens, capable of causing different types of cancer, including leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma;
- Nine are endocrine disruptors (EDCs), which interfere with hormone systems and can cause birth defects, developmental disorders and reproductive problems, such as infertility;
- Eight are 'developmental or reproductive toxins', which have adverse effects on sexual function and fertility in both adults and children, and can reduce the number of functionality of sperm and cause miscarriages;
- Two are cholinesterase inhibitors, reducing the ability of nerve cells to pass information to each other and can impair the respiratory system, causing confusion, headaches and weakness;
- One is classified as acutely toxic, meaning that adverse health effects can result either from a single exposure or from multiple ones in a short period of time (usually 24 hours).

Health

The majority of the chemicals in question (30) were allowed for use in the EU when the UK left on 31st January 2020, but have since been removed from the EU market. The remaining six chemicals have been approved by the UK government, but not in the EU, since Brexit.

One of the primary reasons for the disparity in standards originates from a decision made by the UK government. They have granted an automatic three-year extension to all pesticides with licenses set to expire before December 2023, indicating limited governmental capacity for [re-approving pesticides](#).

Previously, the UK had a policy of granting a maximum 15-year license to pesticides before requiring re-approval, acknowledging the substantial risks these chemicals pose to both human health and the environment.

"The UK government promised to drive a reduction in pesticide use back in 2018 and yet we're still waiting for them to take action", added Mole.

These measures will also affect trade deals between the UK and EU, explained Mole:

"The emerging gap between the UK and EU pesticide standards is incredibly concerning for our human health and environmental protections, but also for the future of UK agriculture as our standards fall further and further behind those of our largest trading partner.

Trading

"UK food exports containing pesticides that EU growers aren't allowed to use, are likely to be rejected. Given that the EU still accounts for around 60% of UK agricultural exports, the impact on farmers could be devastating."

PAN UK urges the UK government to, at the very least, maintain alignment with EU pesticide norms and prevent any further deterioration of existing UK standards.

Additionally, PAN UK advocates for the immediate implementation of long-overdue measures, including pesticide reduction targets, the halt of pesticide use in urban areas, and the enhancement of state support for farmers to reduce their reliance on agrochemicals.

The UK pesticide policies will have far-reaching effects, impacting not just the health of individuals and the environment, but also our farmers and our trade agreements with the EU, our largest trading partner.

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