

Science for Environment Policy

EU pesticide-poisoning data could be harmonised between Member States

Pesticide-related poisonings in EU Member States must be reported to the European Commission under current legislation, but there is no standard information collection and reporting system. A new system has been proposed, which harmonises data collection, categorisation and reporting, enabling exposure data to be compared among Member States. The new system would improve the monitoring of pesticides in Europe and aid the identification of emerging problems.

Pesticides include a diverse range of [chemicals](#), which are used to eliminate or control pests such as weeds and insects. They are widely used in [agriculture](#), the home, hospitals and food-processing facilities. Misuse of pesticides however, such as food contamination or using excessive doses, can potentially harm people and the environment. Within the EU, a comprehensive set of legislation regulates the marketing and use of pesticides to prevent these negative effects.

[Directive 2009/128/EC](#)¹ for example establishes a framework for the sustainable use of pesticides. It currently covers plant protection products (types of pesticide that protect plants and crops). Pesticides have the potential to harm people, animals and the environment and are also covered by separate regulations^{2, 3}.

Member States are required to collect statistics on the placing on the market and use of plant protection products⁴. Regulations also require Member States to collect information and report on suspected cases of poisoning from pesticides. However, there are no common collection and reporting standards, as plant protection products and biocidal products are presently separately categorised within EU legislation.

Harmonising pesticide-poisoning data collection, categorisation and reporting could allow comparable data from different Member States to be pooled in one database. The information in such a database would better support, at both national and European levels, the monitoring and safety evaluation of pesticides and the detection of emerging problems from pesticides. It could also provide evidence for measures to prevent poisoning.

This study, which was co-funded by the EU⁵, reports on a proposed system for classifying pesticide-related poisoning. The researchers categorised the pesticides using the classification of plant-protection products in [Regulation \(EC\) No 1185/2009](#) and biocidal products listed in [Regulation \(EC\) 1451/2007](#)⁶.

The new system unifies the categorisation of all pesticides, according to:

- their **main category of use** (plant protection or biocide);
- **secondary category of use** (for example, insecticides — that target insects — and acaricides — that target ticks and mites);
- **chemical class** (for example, pyrethrins/pyrethroids — pyrethrins are derived from chrysanthemum flowers, pyrethroids are synthetic versions of pyrethrins);
- **active substances** (for example, bifenthrin — a pyrethroid).

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1. [Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides](#)

2. [Regulation \(EC\) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC](#)

3. [Regulation \(EU\) No 528/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2012 concerning the making available on the market and use of biocidal products](#)

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(continued)

The researchers tested the system on data collected on human exposure to pesticides by six Member States. Three national centres (Germany, Italy, the UK) were able to translate the data from their national coding system to the proposed system, adding any exposures to active substances not included in the list by classifying them according to the proposed categorisation system.

Difficulties experienced by the other three centres (Czech Republic, France, Lithuania), such as being unable to distinguish between the main categories of pesticide products, highlighted the need to support data collection and recording, including the development of guidance documents. Providing common tools to help Member States systematically report hazardous exposures to pesticides would improve data comparability and could inform surveillance and early warning systems in Europe.

The researchers say that, if adopted in the EU, the system would not require changes to current regulations. However, policy support would be necessary to implement standardised data recording and categorisation.

Overall, the system – which would provide a valuable evidence base on pesticide exposure – could help policymakers to better understand the burden of chemical related disease (as required by the [REACH](#) regulation) and help ensure that future policies are robust.



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4. [Regulation \(EC\) No 1185/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2009 concerning statistics on pesticides](#)

5. Alerting, Reporting and Surveillance System for Chemical Health Threats Phase III (ASHTIII) received funding from the EU Health Programme: <http://www.asht.eu/>

6. [Regulation \(EC\) No 1451/2007 of 4 December 2007 on the second phase of the 10-year work programme referred to in Article 16\(2\) of Directive 98/8/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the placing of biocidal products on the market](#)