

## CHAOS WITH PESTICIDES

In Croatia no “certificate of competence” needed to obtain pesticides

Kruno Kartus

**LEAD – For the buying of pesticides, at the beginning of this year, the only thing needed was 55 kuna. A “certificate of competence” for handling the pesticides, a document of registered family agricultural farm or business, identity card – none of the above mentioned are necessary when buying highly toxic products which can cause harm to people, insects, bees and domestic animals.**

Location: the industrial zone in Osijek , The Divalt Street 320. On the building of the old shed a sign says “wooden centre”, and in the office a clerk is sitting at the computer keeping record of the sales of the flooring, wooden planks and firewood heaped next to the building in the yard. When asked about the dangerous waste disposal site she points us to the back yard with about ten containers filled with some kind of liquid.

At the entrance, in the hall there is a sign “CIAK – toxic waste disposal site”. The disposal site CIAK in the eastern suburbs of Osijek is one of two locations in Osijek-Baranja County where waste like the bottles of *Chromgor 40* and *Calypso*, pesticides harmful to people and the environment, can be disposed of. Another disposal site is in Donji Miholjac, a small town in the western part of the most intensively agricultural area of this county.

### **Two toxic waste disposal sites for the whole of Osijek- Baranja County**

Anybody wanting to safely dispose of the pesticide packaging needs to find their way to Doni Miholjac or to the suburbs of Osijek and hand them over, only on week days from 9 till 2 pm.

There is another option – they can wait for a special truck by CROCPA which is an association of pesticide manufacturers. This truck will take the packaging of products launched onto the Croatian market by agro-chemical companies - CROCPA’s members. The associatiaon CROCPA consists of 11 companies producing and importing 89 per cent of all the registered pesticides in Croatia. CROCPA collects their own packaging because the law on toxic waste disposal forces them to do so, while for the farmers the handout of pesticide packaging is still voluntary.

« No one stops the farmers from throwing of the pesticide packaging into canals, rubbish or to simply burn it. », a farmer near Osijek witnessed. He wanted to remain anonymous wanting to avoid conflict with the negligent neighbours.

In Croatia, there have been 3879 tons of pesticides produced in 2009 solely, 5760 tons have been imported, and more than 1000 tons have been exported according to the record of Croatian Chamber of Commerce.

The farmers are no less numerous – according to the agricultural listings in 2003 there were 41 thousand agricultural households in Osijek- Baranja County, and the latest records of the county office show 178 agricultural companies. All of them grow some

kind of crop on 212 thousand hectares of plough-fields, gardens, vineyards and orchards using pesticides against pest, diseases and weed.

### **No certificate needed for the pesticide purchase**

For the purchase of these toxic liquids at one agricultural pharmacy in Osijek, during January of this year, the only necessary thing was the 55 kuna. A “certificate of competence” for handling the pesticides, a document of registered family agricultural farm or business, identity card – none of the above mentioned are necessary when buying highly toxic products which can cause harm to people, insects, bees and domestic animals.

This way of obtaining of harmful chemicals is not an exception but a rule, confirms Franjo Plavšić, director of Croatian Institute for toxicology, to the t-portal. «There is no control of our small farmers today, I think. There is no education, the retail sale control is poor, and the usage is not at all supervised in any way» he explains.

The main body for pesticide regulation is the Ministry of agriculture, fishing and rural development, where there is no direct control of all the pesticide users when purchasing pesticides in their agricultural pharmacies. The reply of the Ministry of agriculture to our question of what the pesticide retail and usage looks like in Croatia is that they exercise « aimed supervised controls of legal entities and natural persons who deal in pesticides» since 2007.

At the end of 2010, 478 legal entities and natural persons were dealing in products for crop protection, and there were 935 retail places. In the last three years the pesticide retail has been banned to 48 legal entities and natural persons for the reasons of violation of regulations. In 2010 the inspection has not found any object of this trade violating the regulations.

### **The use of pesticides according to «the knowledge»**

European countries control the sales and use of pesticides much closer compared to Croatia. Henriette Christensen, an expert in the office “Pesticide Action Network”, shared the data which show that the education of farmers, people who use pesticides in Europe is ever more widely spread. In Poland, a pesticide purchaser needs a certificate of competence for the use of toxic and highly toxic pesticides, which needs to be renewed every five years. Belgian farmers need to pass training and get a certificate for pesticide use since last year. Those who want to use pesticides in Great Britain also need to have a certificate of competence, and the same case is with Sweden where similar certificate is valid for five years.

Franjo Plavšić, director of HZT (Croatian Institute for Toxicology and Anti Doping) confirms the statement from the farmer near Osijek – that in Croatia no one demands competence in handling these chemicals ,harmful to people and environment, from the buyers and users. « Averagely 3500 people per year get through our training and by now during 13 years we have issued approximately 40 thousand certificates of

competence. Before the Law on crop protection has been passed, our farmers had to get their training in the agricultural pharmacies, but today that is not obligatory any more. Of course, our farmers consequently never attended our training courses» reveals Plavšić.

The owner of the firm Danon in Zagreb, which represents six foreign pesticide manufacturers on Croatian market, thinks that poor or non-existent education of pesticide users is unacceptable. «Food is supposed to be produced by people who have at least secondary-school education and knowledge of pesticide use regulations. Unfortunately this is not compulsory in our country. At the same time pesticide user needs to know what « karencija» (waiting period) is», warns Danon.

However, the last agricultural listing dating back in 2003 shows that almost a million of farmers in Croatia gained only «experience through practice». Only about eight thousand of Croatian farmers finished the four-year secondary school education. That is less than 1 per cent of the overall number of people working in farming. Farmers in Osijek- Baranja County, a part of the country most intensively agricultural, also work relying on their own practical experience. Anyhow, with or without certificate of competence, the farmers can obtain materials, like for example the ones banned in other countries for being fatal to bees, one of the most beneficial insects to humans.

### **The pesticides harmful to beneficial insects available to everybody**

These are the pesticides proved to have caused bee plague in German district of Baden-Württemberg and which are consequently banned in the whole of Germany and later also in Slovenia and France. These pesticides are manufactured and sold by the firm Bayer under the name of Chinook (with active substances imidacloprid and beta – cyfluthrin), Mesuro (methiocarb), and Poncho (clothianidin). These are also produced by a company Syngenta under the name of Cruiser (thiamethoxam). Besides these toxins there are another twelve substances with a basis of imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, and methiocarb.

Except methiocarb, these active substances belong to a group of insecticides of neonicotinoids. Eight pesticides out of this group have been banned in Germany in 2008, after the beekeepers reported the bee plague when two thirds of bees vanished in the district of Baden-Württemberg. The analyses of bees show that 99 per cent of them were poisoned by clothianidin. That spring, this active substance in the concoction Poncho, was massively used for treating of sugar beet in the district of Baden-Württemberg. Bayer discarded the possibility of such a disastrous effect their product had on bees, but ecological associations and the beekeepers of other countries of EU and USA also insisted on the ban. Imidacloprid, an active substance in pesticides like Chinook, was banned earlier for treating of sugar beet, but also of sunflower in France once again because of bee plague. Thiacloprid also belongs to this, obviously problematic group of pesticides. It is an active substance of Calypso, a pesticide we so easily obtained in Osijek without any necessary certificates.

After the bee plague the neonicotinoids ban was introduced in Italy in 2009, while the scientific researches of crops not treated with these pesticides brought forth positive results. Dr Moreno Greatti at the Italian University in Udine connects neonicotinoids directly to the bee plague. « Depopulation and mortality coincided with the maize sowing here in the region of Friuli this year. Until now the bee colonies develop well. The beekeepers of northern Italy and all other parts of the country unanimously agree that it is to do with termination of use of neonicotinoids and the maize seeds treated with fipronil. There are no reported bee losses in our region during March and April of 2009. That has not happened since 1999! », stated Greatti at the beginning of year 2009, whose words were conveyed by European research- media centre Youris.

Even though the researches are conducted in other European countries, in Croatia the institutions rely only on the regulations at the level of European Union. «In the Republic of Croatia only those materials for the crop protection are to be used whose active substances are listed as allowed for use in materials for protection in Republic of Croatia according to the Annex of the 1st Council Directive 91/414/EEC (with EU legislation). If the ban of active substances of the neonicotinoid group comes to power at the EU level, then the same ban will follow in Republic of Croatia. The negative effects on environment are reduced to the smallest possible amount if pesticide users respect the regulations which are given in the resolution on pesticide registration from the neonicotinoid group», this is the answer of the Ministry of agriculture in December to our question whether Croatia is going to ban neonicotinoids.

«Respecting the regulations» of the resolution, that is of the bottle of toxic chemical, is the only control of pesticide user. To be more precise, they are left to self-control as the close following of regulations of the packet of pesticide is not supervised – the set of rules for pesticide users instruct that « the concoction needs to be used according to the resolution on pesticide registration or certificate consistent to the instructions, cautions and information on the label».

### **FRAME: The amount of pesticides in Croatia – record hitting in 2007**

During a period of the last five years Croatia imported the biggest amount of pesticide since 2007, according to data of Croatian Chamber of Commerce. Altogether 9198 tons of pesticides were imported that year, which is 30 tons more than 2008. In 2006 an amount of 7738 tons of pesticides were imported.

The use suddenly reduced in 2009 when 5760 tons were imported.

On the example of record year of 2007, an approximate calculation can be made which was intended for Croatian market. By adding of imported amount to the produced one the result comes out to 13020 tons of pesticides. By subtracting of the exported amount of pesticides the sum comes to 10473 tons of pesticides intended for Croatian market. These chemicals are packed into the big packaging of several decilitres or small packaging of several millilitres, the packaging which are to be specially disposed of as toxic waste, which does not occur in Croatia.

## FRAME: The pesticide packaging – toxic waste

The packaging of used up pesticides represents toxic waste according to regulation on categories, kinds and classification of waste. According to the waste law every manufacturer and importer of pesticides needs to provide at their own expense separate collection of waste packaging. «In case the manufacturer of waste violates the regulations they are to be fined according to the Waste Law», it is stated by the Ministry of environmental protection.

Danon, as the firm is not a member of CROPCA, had to sign a contract with firm licensed for toxic waste collection. «If we did not sign this kind of agreement and were not lawfully disposing of the pesticide packaging we sell, we would have an inspection called and we would have been fined», Vladimir Danon stated.

On the other hand the final user of pesticides is still not controlled, and they are left to self-control and instructions on the pesticide bottles.

Education of farmers with number of households – data for Croatia and Osijek-Baranja County  
Source: Agriculture Census 2001.

	No. Of households, In total	Only with real life experience	Course finished	Three-year secondary school education	Four-year secondary school education	Vocational college or university
Republic of Croatia						
Total	448 532	969 753	2 480	3 541	8 864	3 905
Osijek-Baranja County						
Total	41 103	80 234	439	703	1 772	678

**This article has been published with a support of the Danish network for investigative journalism Scoop [www.i-scoop.org](http://www.i-scoop.org)**