



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



World Health  
Organization



# Detoxifying agriculture and health from highly hazardous pesticides **A call for action**



# Detoxifying agriculture and health from highly hazardous pesticides

## A call for action



INTER-ORGANIZATION PROGRAMME FOR THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS  
A cooperative agreement among FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNEP, UNIDO, UNITAR, WHO, World Bank and OECD

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While all pesticides can be dangerous when used inappropriately, highly hazardous pesticides are always of particular concern due to the severe adverse effects they can cause to human health and the environment. They constitute a relatively small share of all pesticides registered globally, and yet they can cause the most harm. With adequate investment in scaling-up alternatives, especially existing and new ecological options for pest control, these pesticides that pose unacceptable risk to humans and the environment can be phased out from agriculture and their risk reduced in the health sector by appropriate actions.



# What are highly hazardous pesticides?

Synthetic pesticides are inherently hazardous, and among them, highly hazardous pesticides cause disproportionate harm to the environment and human health. There is particular concern in low-income countries, where highly hazardous pesticides cannot be used safely.

**Highly hazardous pesticides** are defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)/World Health Organization (WHO) International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management (2014)<sup>1</sup> as pesticides that are acknowledged to present particularly high levels of acute or chronic hazards to health or environment according to internationally accepted classification systems such as WHO or GHS [the Globally

Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals] or their listing in relevant binding international agreements or conventions. In addition, pesticides that appear to cause severe or irreversible harm to health or the environment under conditions of use in a country may be considered to be and treated as highly hazardous. A full description of the eight criteria to identify highly hazardous pesticides can be found on pg. 22.

<sup>1</sup> The FAO/WHO International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management (the Code of Conduct) is a voluntary framework to guide government policy makers and regulators, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders on best practices in managing pesticides throughout their lifecycle, from production, use to disposal.

# Facts on highly hazardous pesticides:

- **can be very toxic to humans.**

For example, a fourth of a teaspoon of carbofuran or monocrotophos active ingredients can cause death if ingested;

- **are primarily, but not only, older generation, off-patent chemicals still readily available and in use in many low – and middle – income countries,** even when less hazardous alternatives have al-

ready been authorised (see “why highly hazardous pesticides are still used” at pg.11);

- **cannot be used safely in low – and middle – income countries where suitable** Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for protection against highly hazardous pesticides is not available or not used because it is too expensive or too uncomfortable to wear;
- **have been phased out from agriculture in a number of countries** without affecting agricultural productivity;
- **are one of the most common means of suicide** worldwide, accounting for 15-20 percent of all suicides<sup>2</sup>;
- **can be found in local food systems and global food commodi-**

Minimum requirement for PPE for mixing and filling spray tank with WHO class I and II pesticides includes overalls and boots, gloves, face- shield or goggles, apron and hood or hat and Respiratory Protective Equipment.

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