



Bayer

Overview

Bayer produces some of the world's most toxic pesticides. When it acquires Aventis Crop Science, it will become the second largest agrochemical company in the world. Bayer and Aventis—and the companies they have purchased or merged with in the past—have contributed to the poisoning of Peruvian children, a chemical explosion in Madagascar, and the genetically engineered StarLink corn disaster. These are only a few of the company's higher profile disasters; many more go unreported because victims are poor villagers or farmworkers with little voice. Bayer's record clearly disqualifies the company from meeting the World Bank's guidelines for private sector partnerships.¹

Harming health and the environment

Chemical explosions

An explosion at an AgrEvo (see Company Profile) pesticide plant in Griesheim, Germany contaminated at least 50 hectares of a residential district with hazardous levels of herbicide. Almost two hours passed before AgrEvo warned residents of the leak and told them to remain indoors with windows shut.²

In November 1997, an explosion at a Hoechst (see Company Profile) pesticide factory in a densely populated area of Madagascar caused widespread pollution. Hoechst had insufficient water on site to deal with a fire, and would not supply a list of substances involved in the accident, despite demands from local officials. Over 50 pesticides were involved in the explosion, including 2,4-D and endosulfan.³

Pesticide dumping

Aventis is one of four companies paying US\$73 million in cleanup costs for DDT the company dumped into the ocean off the Palos Verdes Peninsula in southern California. Local fish remain hazardous to eat. Aventis and the other companies insist that the DDT is disintegrating naturally and does not require cleanup.⁴

Producing the most toxic pesticides

Aventis produces one of the world's worst pesticides:

- **Aldicarb makes PAN's Dirty Dozen List**—Aldicarb is one of the most toxic pesticides registered for use in the United States. The World Health Organization classifies aldicarb as extremely hazardous.⁵

Bayer also makes highly hazardous pesticides:

- **Methamidophos residues poison people**—According to U.S. EPA, this insecticide is acutely toxic with a high toxicity in aquatic environments. Methamidophos has caused hundreds of agricultural produce-related poisonings worldwide and has been banned in many countries.⁶

- **Fenthion kills birds**—Fenthion is a moderately acute toxin and highly toxic in aquatic environments, according to the EPA. It is used as an insect and bird toxin and functions as a cholinesterase inhibitor. Agricultural exposure to fenthion has been linked to myopia and other eye defects.⁷ Fenthion has also been linked to mass deaths of non-target wild birds.⁸

Superfund sites

Government designated "Superfund" sites are uncontrolled or abandoned sites in the United States where hazardous waste is

Company Profile

Bayer was founded in Germany in 1863 as a small dyeworks. In 1925, it merged with **BASF** and **Hoechst**. The resultant company, IG Farben, was involved in producing gases used in Hitler's death camps.¹ After the war, the Allies forced the company to break up. **Hoechst**, **Bayer** and **BASF** were not held responsible for I.G. Farben's wartime activities.²

Today **Bayer** produces pharmaceuticals, plastics and various other chemicals for domestic, industrial and agricultural use. Many of its pesticides are considered some of the most severely toxic in use today. With some 122,000 employees in over 350 individual companies worldwide, **Bayer** recorded net income of US\$1.6 billion in 2000.

Bayer is currently in the process of acquiring **Aventis Crop Science**. Combined agrochemical sales of **Bayer** and **Aventis** are expected to total between US\$5.7 and 6.1 billion in 2001, making **Bayer** the second largest agrochemical company in the world.

Aventis, a multinational corporation focusing on pharmaceuticals and agricultural products, was formed in December 1999 by the merger of **Hoechst** (Germany) and **Rhône-Poulenc** (France). **Aventis CropScience**, responsible for pesticides and both genetically engineered (GE) and non-GE seeds, is a combination of **Rhône-Poulenc Agro** and **Hoechst's AgrEvo**. **Aventis CropScience** employs 16,000 in more than 140 countries.³

Aventis CropScience is the third largest pesticide company in the world, with sales of more than US\$3.7 billion in 2000. **Bayer** was the sixth largest agrochemical company in 2000, with sales of more than US\$2.2 billion.⁴

1 "Aventis Sa: Starlink Corn Controversy Spotlights Large Pharmaceutical & Chemical Cos." The *Agribusiness Examiner*, Issue #95, November 14, 2000.

2 *Agribusiness Examiner*, op. cit.

3 "Aventis in Brief," <http://www.aventis.com>.

4 *Agrow: World Crop Protection News*, January 5, March 2 and April 13, 2001.

located. Bayer and Aventis subsidiaries are responsible for at least 24 Superfund sites.⁹

Biosafety breaches

• **The StarLink disaster**—Aventis' StarLink corn was genetically engineered to produce a toxin that kills certain corn pests. The corn, however, was approved in the U.S. only for animal feed due to concerns of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that it could cause allergic reactions in humans. It was approved with the condition that farmers and food processors would keep StarLink separate from other types of corn.

In 2000, Genetically Engineered Food Alert, a coalition of U.S. environmental and consumer groups, discovered that, due in large part to Aventis' disregard for requirements imposed by EPA, StarLink corn had made its way into products on supermarket shelves. Over time, more than 300 products were recalled by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and more than 40 people reported having allergic reactions. StarLink was found to have contaminated large quantities of the corn harvest through cross pollination and mixing at grain silos.

• **GE crops on the loose**—Genetically engineered Aventis canola from an Australian test site was found dumped in a local landfill. Aventis was also subjected to an audit in Australia because they failed to maintain the required 15 meter buffer zones around test plots.¹⁰ In 1998, a UK regulatory committee criticized Aventis for failing to implement sufficient measures to limit the escape of pollen from a test site for genetically engineered wheat.¹¹

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Notes

1 Partnerships with the Private Sector: Assessment and Approval, Business Partnership & Outreach Group, The World Bank Group, Washington, DC. <http://www.worldbank.org/business/03assessment.html#guidance>.

2 "Aventis," Corporate Watch GE Briefing Series, April 2000. <http://www.gm-info.org.uk/gm-info/briefings/aventis3.html>.

3 "Fire at Hoechst storage depot in Madagascar," *Pesticides News* No. 38, December 1997, PAN UK. "Chemical Explosions: Madagascar and Alabama," PANUPS, December 23, 1997. "Aventis," Corporate Watch GE Briefing Series, April 2000, <http://www.gm-info.org.uk/gm-info/briefings/aventis3.html>.

4 "DDT Manufacturers Pay \$73 Million for Clean Up," *Global Pesticide Campaigner*, April 2001. *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 2000.

5 PAN International, Dirty Dozen Pesticide Fact Sheets, 1990.

6 "Sri Lanka Bans Two Toxic Pesticides," PANUPS, May 19, 1995.

7 "Eye Defects Linked to Organophosphate Exposure," *Current Research Monitor* No. 24, April 1994. The Pesticides Trust.

8 "U.S. Government Sued For Bird Deaths," PANUPS, February 1, 2002.

9 <http://www.scorecard.org>, <http://www.ntis.gov/search.htm>, http://www.epa.gov/enviro/html/cerdis/cerdis_query.html

10 "Report on Audit of Aventis CropScience Pty. Ltd.: Conduct of Field Trials in Accordance with GMAC Regulations," www.health.gov.au/ogtr/publications/pdf/audaventis.pdf; "Genetically Manipulated Optimism: Fast Track for GMOs," Australian Conservation Foundation GeneEthics Network, <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/2000/Oct00/Phelps.htm>.

11 Corporate Watch, op. cit.

Pushing Toxic Pesticides in Developing Countries

Methyl parathion—Bayer makes the nerve toxin methyl parathion, an extremely hazardous pesticide (WHO Class Ia) that is one of PAN's Dirty Dozen pesticides. It is also listed in the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC), created to help participating countries avoid importing hazardous pesticides.

• **Poisoning in Peru.** On October 22, 1999, 24 children were killed and 18 others poisoned in the Peruvian village of Taucamarca after they drank powdered milk contaminated with methyl parathion, manufactured by Bayer. Bayer had packaged methyl parathion in small plastic bags, with warnings written in Spanish but not Quechua, the language of the village and of 10 million people in the Andean highlands. The packages also displayed pictograms showing healthy vegetables rather than toxicity. Villagers filed a class-action suit against Bayer on October 22, 2001, the two year anniversary of the tragedy.¹

Endosulfan—Endosulfan is banned in many countries because of its acute toxicity for humans. This highly toxic insecticide is also suspected of interfering with hormonal function.²

• **Intimidation in the Philippines.** After the Philippine government banned endosulfan in 1992, Hoechst challenged the Philippine Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority's action and initiated contempt proceedings against a doctor for having spoken about endosulfan's dangers at a public conference. Endosulfan had been identified as the leading cause of pesticide poisonings in the Philippines.³

• **Misinformation in Colombia.** When, after six years of struggle, Colombians banned endosulfan in 1995, Hoechst took out full-page ads in Colombian newspapers warning that the lack of endosulfan would lead to deepened poverty for Colombians.⁴

1 "Legal Action Filed Against Bayer in the Pesticide Poisoning Deaths of 24 Children in the Peruvian Andes," October 31, 2001.

http://www.CBGnetwork.org/home/Newsletter_KCB/KCB_48/kcb_48.html.

2 Illinois EPA, Report on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals, Illinois, EPA, 1997.

3 Rosenthal, E. and E. Nivia, "PAN Campaign Update: Hoechst and Endosulfan—the Saga Continues," *Global Pesticide Campaigner*, June 1995; Hickey, E., "International Citizens' Campaign Targets Hoechst Pesticides," *Global Pesticide Campaigner*, September 1994.

4 Ibid.

