



The Environment Centre N.T. Inc

GREENPEACE

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Australia protects NT polluters at international treaty meeting

Darwin, Tuesday, December 5th, 2000: The Australian Government has been condemned by green groups today, as it joined an international treaty negotiation to lobby for the continued use of cancer-causing chemicals in the Northern Territory.

Mirex, sold as Mirant, is used to kill giant termites in the Northern Territory even though safer alternatives are available. It is one of the 'dirty dozen' chemicals earmarked by the United Nations for elimination under a global treaty being negotiated by over 100 governments in South Africa. Australia is seeking an exemption under the treaty for mirex.

"Mirex is a known dangerous poison and yet Australia continues to protect the polluters who use it. The Government must accept that it is not protecting Northern Territory enterprise but rather it is poisoning Northern Territory people," said Matt Ruchel, Greenpeace Toxics Campaigner.

"Most countries, including the United States, banned the use of mirex in the 1970's because it is persistent and toxic - but Australia is quite happy to ignore science and international example."

From December 4th to 9th, world governments are meeting to draft the treaty to ban some of the world's most dangerous chemicals at the fifth and final Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC5) meeting in Johannesburg. Mirex is one of those chemicals and has been shown to have impacts on nervous and reproductive systems as well as being linked to tumours in the liver, adrenal gland and kidney.

There is estimated to be 220 kg of technical grade Mirex stockpiled in the Northern Territory, 20 to 40 years worth of the chemical.

"Australia thinks it is protecting industry -it is false economics given that the continued use of Mirex poses a threat to Australia's reputation as a clean producer of food. It is unacceptable for any industry to expose Territorians to a chemical of such high toxicity, particularly when viable alternatives exist," said Kirsten Blair, Coordinator of the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory.

Mirex was recently regulated as a Schedule 7 Poison under the Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act 1999. Users are required to obtain permits across the counter from NT Health Service, however use is still considered widespread in the Northern Territory. It is illegal under these regulations for Mirant to be used on food crops, however some use is believed to continue.

For more information contact Kirsten Blair, Coordinator of the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory on (08) 8981 1984, Greenpeace Toxics Campaigner Matt Ruchel on (03) 9478 9769 or (0408) 837 138, or Greenpeace Media Officer Lynne Minion on (02) 9263 0314 or (0408) 268 024.

Information and updates on the INC5 meeting are available from Greenpeace International at: www.greenpeace.org/~toxics/toxic2.html Background information on Mirex and other chemicals in Australia is available at: www.greenpeace.org.au/campaigns/toxics.php3