

Farmers still using dangerous pesticides

By SAM RITH

Hazardous pesticides banned two years ago are still being sold by vendors and used by farmers throughout Cambodia, according to Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries officials and local NGOs.

Buntuon Simona, vice-chief of the Plant Protection and Phytosanitary Inspection Office at MAFF, said his ministry listed 116 common names of pesticides banned for use in Cambodia, but because of continuing illegal imports, some pesticides were still available around the country.

Pesticides are used by 63 per-

cent of farmers to protect their crops and 27 percent of villages have one or two shops selling pesticides, according to a study by the Centre d'Etude et de Développement Agricole Cambodgien (CEDAC) in 2003. The study was conducted in 83 villages in Kandal, Kratie, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu, Takeo and Prey Veng.

Keam Makarady, program officer at CEDAC, said most pesticides and chemicals were imported illegally, particularly from Vietnam and Thailand.

"As I know so far, only one

company had registered at the MAFF to import pesticides and chemicals into Cambodia," Makarady said.

Simona said, "Some pesticides, such as methyl-parathion, are not allowed to be used in other countries but some [Cambodian] farmers still use them."

The illegal import and misuse of pesticides and chemicals has caused public concern in Asia and Europe.

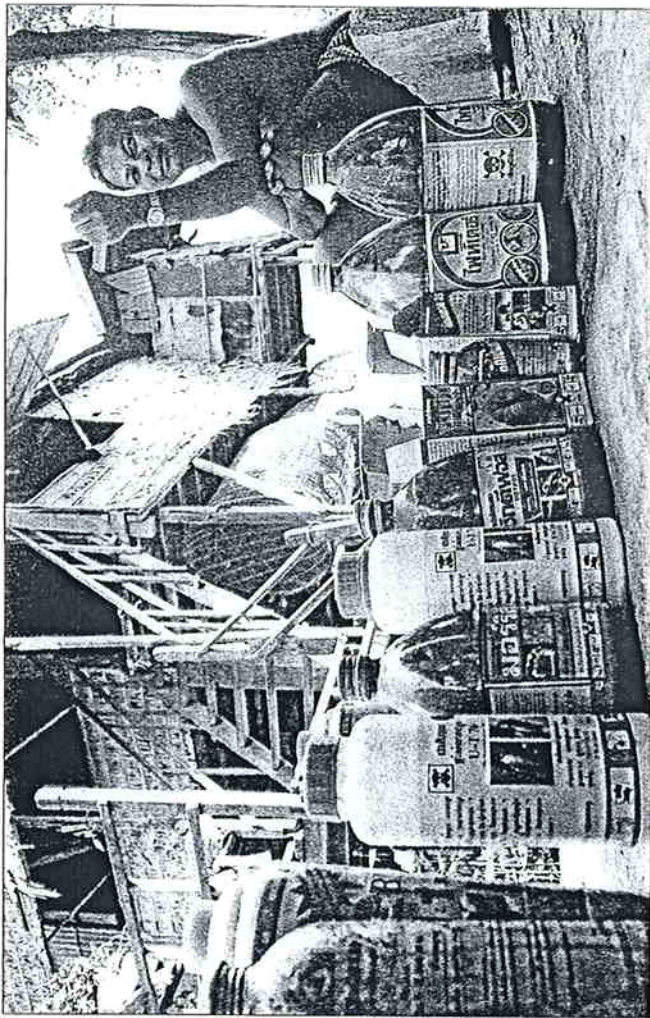
Bo Gohl, Regional Environment Adviser for the Swedish Environment Secretariat in Asia (SENSA), said hazardous chemicals and pesticides in particular had become a danger for public health. Swedish authorities have been in the forefront for many years trying to address this problem in Europe.

"We think that attention should be given also to the situation in developing countries where the problems are much more severe.

"SENSA will within a short time embark on a regional program trying to reduce or eliminate the use of the most dangerous of the acutely toxic pesticides," Gohl said.

"We will attempt several avenues for this: preparing a licensing system for pesticide traders, launching a program on awareness, training staff in ecotoxicology and pesticide residue analysis, training farmers in the use of alternatives to chemical pesticides, and supporting research on biological pesticides and so on," he said.

Late last month, "hazardous chemicals and pesticides" was one of a dozen major issues discussed during a three-day con-



BOU SAREUN

Prek Lavea farmer Seang showed the Post his collection of pesticides in 2002. Not much has changed.

ference, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), in Jakarta titled "One Third of our Planet: What Can Asia and Europe do for Sustainable Development?" The event was attended by 350 high-profile personalities and experts from Asia and Europe.

Addressing the issue of hazardous chemicals and pesticides, the participants resolved on a key message: dealing with problems associated with acute toxic pesticides is the most pressing need, because despite campaigns by NGOs, researchers, and others, the overuse and misuse of pesticides is still high and affects public health.

Their recommendations include recognizing that cooperation between Asia and the EU in chemical risk management is necessary to close the widening gap in capacity now seen (for ASEM); that industry must accept its responsibility according to the "polluter pay" principle and ensure that all chemicals come with full information about effects (for industry); that cooperation between governments in the region is required to eliminate illegal trade and use of banned chemicals and information on effects of specific chemicals can not be kept confidential (for Asian governments); and that chemicals affect public

health and poverty, and should be included in national poverty reduction strategies. The conference's recommendations for a better environment and sustainable development will be submitted to the relevant ministers of each of the 39 ASEM governments and also to the ASEM Summit of leaders in Helsinki in September 2006.

The Asia-Europe Environment Forum is co-organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation, the Harms Seitel Stiftung of Germany, the Institute for Global Environment Studies with support of the government of Japan, and the United Nations Environment Program.

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