

Standby statement

Response to report in *L'Hebdo* regarding Galecron

A May 12th article in the Swiss weekly magazine *L'Hebdo* reported about possible cases of work-related illness of employees or former employees of the chemical industry in Monthey. The report alleges that cases of bladder cancer in the region of canton Valais could be related to the exposure to the insecticide chlordimeform (brand name Galecron). Between 1966 and 1976, and again from 1978 till 1988, Galecron was produced and sold by Ciba-Geigy, a Syngenta legacy company.

The monitoring of Syngenta employees at the Monthey site has shown no significant trend to increased bladder cancer rates over the last 17 years. Official statistics for Switzerland and the Valais indicate that the bladder cancer rate observed among workers exposed to Galecron in Monthey is in the range of the Valais population in general. Furthermore, the rate of Monthey district is comparable to the rate of the Martigny and the Sierre districts, where there was no production of Galecron.

From 1976 to 1978, production and sales of Galecron had been stopped while safety of the product was thoroughly assessed. Supported by the latest research and including exposure monitoring for workers and applicators, Galecron was re-launched in 1978 and was approved by regulatory authorities in several countries, including the USA, Australia, Mexico and Brazil. From the time of the re-launch, the active ingredient was produced in a closed system at a single facility in Monthey. For applicators, additional recommendations on protective equipment were introduced to further reduce exposure to the product.

Ciba-Geigy decided to stop production and sales of Galecron in 1988 after more recent research and exposure monitoring showed a potential risk for applicators. In order to ensure proper disposal, products in stock were sent to Monthey and incinerated under strict rules, and pose no health or environmental risk today.

Beginning in 1988, Ciba-Geigy focused its efforts on health monitoring for early identification of bladder disease. Early identification, and therefore early treatment, is the most effective means to cure any disease of the bladder and support those that may be affected. In 2000, Syngenta continued this focus.

In Monthey, the health-screening programs started in 1988. This program is ongoing 17 years after production and marketing for the product was stopped, and will continue. Approximately 300 former and present production workers in Monthey are participating in regular health monitoring.

Both Ciba-Geigy and Syngenta have continually informed their employees about possible risks linked to the production of the product and the objectives of the health-screening program put in place. They have been paying for monitoring and, where necessary, treatment in all such cases where this was not covered by health insurance. Syngenta will continue to do so in the future.

In Switzerland, health insurance is obligatory. Any disease assumed to be work-related is fully covered by the federal insurance scheme. Under Swiss regulations, proven causality is not a prerequisite to consider an illness to be work-related, even where other factors are more likely causes, e.g. smoking.

In the US, as part of a settlement agreement of class action litigation in 1995, Ciba-Geigy agreed to cover costs for health monitoring and treatment. The settlement also foresaw compensation for individuals found to suffer from bladder disease. At the time, Ciba-Geigy stated that this settlement did not assign liability or wrongdoing to the company. The legal system in the US allows compensation payments even in cases where precautionary measures based on latest scientific data have been strictly observed. Such compensation is often used for treatment where no health insurance exists and to cover legal expenses.

“These illnesses are tragic for those concerned and for their families to whom we express our deepest sympathy. We have always taken this matter very seriously, and we will continue to make all possible efforts to protect the health and well-being of our employees“, said Mauricio Ranzi, Head of Syngenta Monthey.

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