

Tea Board of India

Press Note

Greenpeace report on Plant Protection Formulation and Indian Tea

The Tea Board of India having reviewed the findings of the Greenpeace study, can confirm that all the samples tested by them comply with the Indian laws and regulations, designed to protect consumers.

The Tea Board of India would like to dispel any misconceptions about Indian tea in the eyes of consumers at large. Indian teas are well regarded the world over and are totally safe following stringent standards. The Indian tea industry led by the Tea Board of India has been constantly taking steps to make tea cultivation more sustainable and reduce its reliance on synthetic plant protection formulations to ensure that Indian tea continues to meet the high standards expected by the consumers. These steps include:

- ☐ The launch of trustea, an initiative which will have certified at least 50 million kilograms of tea by December 2014
- ☐ The development of the Plant Protection Code to aid best practice in tea cultivation (http://www.teaboard.gov.in/pdf/notice/Plant_Protection_Code.pdf)
- ☐ Identifying, and advocating for, even higher standards by partnering with the industry on a scientific pilot that will ascertain the feasibility of non synthetic plant protection formulations for tea cultivation.

Tea Board of India is open to collaborating with all stakeholders to help make tea production in India more sustainable in the long run. It was in this vein that Tea Board organized a seminar for Greenpeace to interact with the small growers in the tea sector recently.

In the interest of clarifying any concerns that may have arisen in the minds of consumers and other stakeholders, the Tea Board of India has put out a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) which can be seen on its website at <http://www.teaboard.gov.in>. The analysis made by the Tea Board of the specific points raised in the Greenpeace report are briefly described below:-

Issue: That 34 pesticides were found in branded tea samples

Analysis : It is important to note that in total there are 37 Central Insecticide Board and Registration Committee (CIB & RC) approved PPFs for use in Tea.

Issue: That a compilation of PPFs could be harmful

Analysis: There can be presence of more than one PPFs due to application of more than one PPFs applied to multiplicity of pest infestation or different teas are sourced for blending which could have been subjected to different spraying regimes.

To say that a mix of PPFs implies a synergetic effect of the residues of multiple PPFs, is contrary to the established science. The level at which a PPF could be harmful is determined on a specific basis with respect to each PPF and as long as each residue level is within limits on a consistent basis, the product is safe for consumers. Extensive scientific evaluation about the bio-efficacy and safety of the end crop have informed the guidelines and strict regulations for use for each of the prescribed PPFs that have been developed by the Indian government. These guidelines and regulations have been formulated to safeguard consumers. Indian tea that is grown as per these guidelines is safe to consume.

At the same, the internally accepted norms like ADI (Acceptable Daily Intake) needs to be considered. For all instances of PPF residue traces, these are well below ADI (80 to 200 times below ADI).

Status with regard to PPFs:

Monocrotophos: Monocrotophos is amongst the 20 most commonly used PPFs in Indian agriculture, and is permitted for use in combating sucking insects that affect cotton, paddy, maize, various types of grams, peas, sugarcanes, cater, mustard, citrus, mango, coconut, coffee, and cardamom crops. Its popularity amongst agricultural producers and deep immersion into the Indian agricultural industry might very account for its presence in Indian teas.

The Tea Board in consultation with tea research institutes and industry has developed the Plant Protection Code to encourage more effective use of PPFs. This code does not advise the use of Monocrotophos and suggests suitable alternatives.

It is to be noted that even after usage of a chemical is stopped, it is possible to detect minor residues for some time thereafter as they may persist in the environment. The presence of residues is not to be equated with actual usage.

Triazophos: Triazophos does not feature in CIB & RC list of approved PPFs. Tea research Institutes have stopped recommendation of this PPF since 2005. Accidental contamination from other agricultural crops through drift and irrigation water could lead to presence of these chemicals in tea crop.

DDT: DDT is banned for use in Agriculture since 1989. DDT is also not among the CIB & RC approved list of PPFs for use in Tea. Tea Plantations across India have long stopped use of DDT as a crop protection formulation.

Traces of DDT are likely to have been found owing to the extensive length of time that DDT takes to degrade in the soil, therefore lasting longer in the environment to which it is introduced. Also DDT is still widely in use by public health bodies as a measure of control for vector borne diseases such as malaria which may lead to some degree of runoff into adjoining areas.

It is relevant to point out that because of its long persistence, mere detection of traces of DDT cannot be construed as improper direct use in tea plants and does not breach FSSAI rules. Regulatory jurisdictions such as EU - following stringent norms – do have MRL for DDT (at 0.2 mg/kg) owing to its persistence.

Thiamethoxam, Thiacloprid, Deltamethrin & Dicofof: These PPFs mentioned in Greenpeace's report were found to be well below FSSAI levels and safe. The report however also acknowledges that detected residues are well below the EU MRLs for these chemicals which are 20, 10, 5 & 20 mg/kg respectively. It is pertinent to mention that there is an Indian MRL specified under FSSAI for Dicofof set at 5 mg/kg. The samples analysed by GP state that Dicofof level ranged between 0.01-0.14 mg/kg i.e. well below FSSAI limit.