

# Campaigner wins case against Government policy on pesticides

**O**n 14 November veteran campaigner Georgina Downs won a landmark legal case against the Government's current policy on pesticide use.

For the past seven years Ms Downs, who runs the UK Pesticides Campaign ([www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk](http://www.pesticidescampaign.co.uk)), has been campaigning to highlight the Government's fundamental failure to protect rural residents and communities from exposure to toxic pesticides sprayed near homes, schools, children's playgrounds and other premises.

In his High Court Judgment Mr Justice Collins made it very clear that the Government had been acting unlawfully in its policy and approach in relation to the use of pesticides in crop spraying and that public health, in particular rural residents and communities exposed to pesticides from living in the vicinity of regularly sprayed fields, is not being protected and that this applies to both acute effects and chronic, adverse health effects.

The Judgment states, '*The alleged inadequacies of the model and the approach to authorisation and conditions of use have been scientifically justified. The claimant has produced cogent arguments and evidence to indicate that the approach does not adequately protect residents and so is in breach of the Directive.*'

Speaking outside the High Court, Ms Downs commented: 'The fact that there has never been any assessment of the risks to health for the long-term exposure for those who live, work or go to school near pesticide-sprayed fields is an *absolute scandal*, considering that crop-spraying has been a predominant feature of agriculture for over 50 years.'

Ms Downs, who has lived next to regularly sprayed fields for over 24 years and has long-standing health problems, was the first to identify serious, fundamental flaws in the so-called 'Bystander risk assessment', which assumes there will only be occasional, short-term exposure to the spray cloud at the time of the application only (ie. immediate spraydrift) for five minutes (or less), from a single pass of



Georgina Downs celebrating at the High Court in November. Earlier in 2008 she won the first-ever *Inspirational Eco Woman of the Year Award* in the *Daily Mail's* Inspirational Women of the Year awards and was named a 'Woman of the Year' and invited to the prestigious Women of the Year Lunch at the Guildhall, London, in October. Photo: PA Photos.

a sprayer, based on a person standing eight metres from the spray boom and only on dermal and inhalation routes of exposure. It also assumes exposure is only to one pesticide at any time.

Mr Justice Collins agreed with Ms Downs' long-standing charge that the 'Bystander' model *does not and cannot* address residents who are repeatedly exposed through various factors and routes to mixtures of pesticides and other chemicals throughout every year and, in many cases, for decades.

## Government to appeal

In mid-December, despite statements made by DEFRA when the Judgment was issued that, 'The protection of human health is paramount' and that 'we will look at this judgment in detail to see whether there are ways in which we can strengthen our system...', the Government announced that it will be appealing against the High Court ruling.

A disgusted Ms Downs said: 'The Government's decision to appeal this ruling continues to demonstrate its absolute contempt for rural residents and communities and is a disgrace. Heads should be rolling following such

a landmark Judgment but, instead, it's "business as usual", with the Government's relentless attempts to protect the industry as opposed to the health of its citizens abundantly clear.'

She points out that this is no surprise considering that the Government regulators, the Pesticides Safety Directorate, the key officials advising ministers on pesticides, receives roughly 60 percent of its funding from the agro-chemical industry.

Ms Downs stated: 'The Government's extraordinary attempts to protect the industry as opposed to people's health has been one of the most outrageous things to behold in the last seven years of my fight. This is especially apparent at the moment as, not content with not protecting its own citizens, the UK Government has been doing everything possible to scupper new European pesticide proposals from having the primary focus on health protection of citizens across Europe to one of primarily protecting the industry.'

Despite its efforts, in January the EU voted to ban some of the most toxic and dangerous pesticides currently in use.

[Ms Downs' battles with Government, agricultural vested interests and their devious behaviour is reminiscent of similar fights by the late Mark Purdey in his dealings with them over the BSE fiasco – see book critique last issue.]

## Seaweed could replace salt in food

**R**esearch at Sheffield Hallam University has shown that seaweed could be used instead of traditional salt to reduce the salt content of food, whilst still maintaining flavour and taste.

Seaweed contains very high levels of nutrients compared to land plants (see article in *Caduceus*, 74) and tests using Seagreens® wild wrack seaweed found it contains an ideal balance of all the mineral salts, including sodium at around 3.5% instead of 40% typically found in salt.

It also prolonged shelf life as well as salt, is free of all common contaminants and 100% vegetable in origin so suitable for vegetarians and vegans.

• In *Sea Energy Agriculture* (Acres, 2003; [www.acresusa.com](http://www.acresusa.com)), US Dr Maynard Murray presents years of research showing that plants (and animals) fed with sea solids fertilizer/feed grew stronger and more resistant to disease.