



# The beginning of a new chapter for public health at the European Parliament

Conference and demonstration in Brussels

PHOTOS

DOCUMENTS & REFERENCES

*The mobilization of 50 health mutuals on Thursday, April 11th in Brussels marks the beginning of a vital new chapter for public health in Europe. Between them, these organizations protect more than 30 million people – and they're determined to join forces to ensure a healthy future for all Europeans. With that aim in mind, the mutuals have come together with a range of other key stakeholders – scientific, legal, professional, trade union, economic and political – to shine a spotlight on issues related to asbestos, pesticides, and organic food.*

*We're all here together to stand in full solidarity with farmers, the first group to suffer from the effects of pesticides. More broadly, everyone in society is affected by*

*these poisons from a very young age – our water, air, soil, and food are all polluted by pesticides.*

*But there's one piece of good news. It is entirely possible for us to create a future where we're freed from the insidious dangers that pesticides pose.*

*Doing so means acting on the lessons that we've learned from the asbestos tragedy – which still causes a shocking 90,000 avoidable deaths every year in Europe. It took a whole century to achieve a ban on asbestos, largely because of the myth that it could be used safely under controlled circumstances. Today, this new chapter we're beginning must lead to the urgent phase-out of pesticides, through the creation of agricultural systems that truly benefit social and planetary health. In the coming weeks, dozens of European health mutuals will work together to develop a common action plan for scaling up solutions.*

*This day marks a new chapter for public and planetary health, thanks to the involvement of 50 European mutuals working to build a new agricultural future – one where pesticides are totally absent.*

## PRESS RELEASE

**Brussels, April 11, 2024**

**A collective of 50 health mutuals from three countries – France, Belgium and Poland – representing more than 30 million Europeans has attended a major event in Brussels today.** Co-organized in partnership with **scientists, trade union federations, entrepreneurs, international associations, and Members of the European Parliament**, the unique gathering is geared to raise awareness and mobilize action around crucial issues relating to **asbestos, pesticides, and organic food.**

**This unprecedented conference** signals a new chapter in European efforts to protect public health and the environment: its aim is to shield present and future generations from the very real but entirely avoidable dangers posed by asbestos and pesticides. The initiative is being supported by 50 MEPs from across the political spectrum, including **Marie Toussaint, Manon Aubry and Sylvie Guillaume.**

In recent months, a series of European decisions – such as the abandonment of regulations aiming to halve pesticide use in Europe by 2030, the 10-year extension granted for the use of the weedkiller glyphosate, and the deliberate watering-down of the Green Deal and the 'From Farm to Fork' programme – have caused serious concerns for public health.

**The agrochemical industry and its lobbyists must not continue to compromise our collective future**

In Europe, we know that 80% of insects have disappeared over the last three decades, and

we know that chronic diseases linked to pesticide exposure are sharply on the rise. Pesticides pollute our air, water, soil, food, and ultimately our bodies, driving what the World Health Organization calls a true “epidemic of preventable chronic diseases.” This is a crucial public health issue.

Around 50 million Europeans suffer from one or more chronic diseases that have been linked to pesticides. Two collective scientific assessments by [INSERM](#) in [2013](#) and then in [2021](#) revealed that pesticides bear some responsibility for several rapidly increasing diseases, including prostate and breast cancers, brain tumors and Parkinson’s. And yet today, over 60,000 tonnes of pesticides are used annually in France. [Across Europe as a whole the figure is many times higher](#): in 2021, 355,175 tonnes of pesticides were sold in the European Union.

## Asbestos and pesticides: a similar story

The dangers of pesticides are strikingly similar to the dangers of asbestos. Both are known to cause work-related cancers, which come with immense costs of between €270-610 billion each year, representing 1.8%-4.1% of the European Union’s total gross domestic product (ETUI study link conducted in 2017). But these cancers are *preventable* – as are the associated costs for the healthcare systems of every EU Member State, if effective prevention policies are implemented.

Asbestos is not a problem confined to the past. Despite the landmark victory achieved with its European trade ban in 2005, there are still hundreds of thousands of tonnes of this deadly mineral in buildings across Europe today. Over the coming years, millions of these buildings will be demolished or renovated, potentially leading to dangerous exposure for the workers involved. In order to avoid a new wave of asbestos victims, effective preventative measures must be urgently implemented.

*“As the myth of controlled pesticide use is increasingly crumbling, good news is emerging. We now have the solutions to bring about a Europe that is 100% organic in agriculture. This exciting new direction will rejuvenate our gastronomy, our public health, and even the health of our planet,”* declares **Martin Rieussec-Fournier, Coordinator of the Conference at the European Parliament, and representative of Mutuelle Familiale.**

### **Testimony from Isabelle Marchand, member of the Support Collective for Pesticide Victims in the West and mother of Cloé, poisoned by pesticides.**

*“I am the mother of Cloé, a 14-year-old girl, and we live in St Nolff in Morbihan, in a housing estate in a rural municipality; our garden borders a field cultivated intensively with pesticides. In October 2019, when Cloé was 10, she was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia; chemotherapy destroys her immune system, and we were very concerned about pesticide treatments under her bedroom window.*

*“We alerted the town hall; no response. I contacted the Collective to remove pesticides from our land. After negotiations with the farmer, we obtained a 70-metre grass buffer strip. Unfortunately, the following summer, the farmer cultivated potatoes with weekly treatments; new anguish. New mobilization with media coverage. We won a ruling mandating that the 8-hectare plot should be*

*cultivated organically.*

*“In early 2024, Cloé relapses; we don’t understand! In the midst of an agricultural crisis! We’re horrified by the agricultural concessions the government has accepted (the ecophyto pause, etc.), and we’re even more worried about the future and Cloé’s health.”*

Given the urgency of the situation we face, more than **40 European mutuals** are asking the European Parliament and the European Commission to take **six actions**:

1. **Remove asbestos from schools, gymnasiums and other public buildings in Europe** by 2032 and create a European fund to finance asbestos management.
2. **Revise the European diagnostic guide** to reflect current scientific knowledge and the new diseases that have been recognized as asbestos-related.
3. **Apply European legislation on toxicity assessment** before pesticides receive market authorization.
4. **Maintain the objective of reducing pesticide use by 50% across the European Union** by 2030, as provided for in the SUR regulation.
5. **Establish mandatory minimum sustainability criteria in public procurement for food items** (including a minimum of 20% organic) at EU level by 2025, including in schools and early childhood care facilities.
6. **Implement the INRAE scenario for a 100% agro-ecological Europe** without pesticides by 2050, with an intermediate goal of 25% organic farming by 2030.

These proposed actions were conceived with the assistance of the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (FETBB), Ban Asbestos France, Secrets Toxiques, the Support Collective for Pesticide Victims in the West, and IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements). They follow on from those submitted to the Senate on February 5th in Paris.

**Eric Gall, Deputy Director of IFOAM Organics Europe**, states:

*“We commend this mobilization of mutuals for the health of farmers and of all Europeans, and of the ecosystems on which we depend to produce our food. Given the current context of setbacks and polarization around the need to transition our agricultural model, it is fundamental to reaffirm that the future of European agriculture must involve a phase-out of synthetic pesticides and a clear shift towards agro-ecology. Organic farmers demonstrate every day that it is possible to produce quality food while respecting biodiversity and planetary boundaries, but they need more ambitious and coherent public policies of support.”*

## **A CALL FOR TOTAL COMMITMENT**

Following the conference, a demonstration involving hundreds of people took place in front of the European Parliament to



demand a change of agricultural course for the 21st century.

In the wake of the tractor protests in February, the demonstration called for a 100% organic agriculture that respects human health, the planet, and the climate. The vast majority of citizens, including farmers, want a change of model and agriculture without pesticides. They expect Europe to fully embrace peasant agriculture and agroecology.

With the European elections approaching, many of them – farmers, citizens, artists, musicians – joined this beautiful gathering in person, to set out their demands and to make their voices heard.

## NOTES TO THE EDITOR

-> Op-eds [signed by the coalition](#) recently published:

- [Les Echos](#)
- [Euronews](#)
- [Carenews](#)
- [We Demain](#)
- [Reporterre](#)

-> **Many doctors are taking a stand on pesticides:** [700 doctors and healthcare professionals](#) are calling for a ‘mobilization’ to reduce the impacts of pesticides on human health and biodiversity.

-> **Evaluation of pesticide product toxicity:** deficiencies and consequences: [YouTube link](#)

-> **April 2014** – English publication of *Toxic Secrets – FACING TOGETHER THE PESTICIDE SCANDAL* (Jouvence Société Edition)

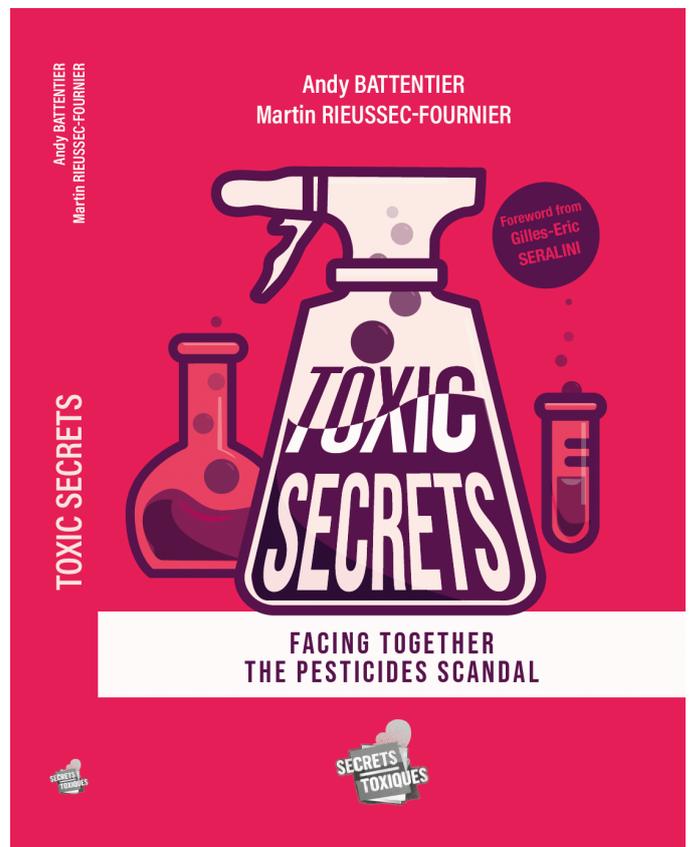
- Presentation of the Toxic Secrets campaign, the pesticide scandal, and the responses it has received

- Authors: Andy Battentier and Martin Rieussec-Fournier
- Limited edition price: €18 – all author royalties will be donated to the Toxic Secrets campaign
- Available on request from the Toxic Secrets campaign: [contactsecretstoxiques@protonmail.com](mailto:contactsecretstoxiques@protonmail.com)

## THERE ARE SOLUTIONS TO GET RID OF TOXIC PESTICIDES

Cancers, chronic diseases, infertility... The role of pesticides in the emergence of health problems and the disappearance of insects has been demonstrated by numerous scientific works. The aim of this book is to give the public the keys to understand and act on this issue. Pesticides' origins in fossil fuels are too often forgotten. The absurdity of the evaluation methods used is little known. But this book is not just about denouncing a problem. It is a real call to action, proposing a series of reflections on the most effective ways to act in the past, present, and future. You will find practical solutions for acting and making your voice heard, for defending the right to food free of pesticide residues, and demanding better protection for people and nature.

*"We must demand that authorities make decisions that protect future generations. This is the meaning and hope of the Toxic Secrets initiative."* **Benoît Biteau, Member of the European Parliament**



## SPOKESPERSONS FOR INTERVIEW IN ENGLISH:

- **Martin Rieussec-Fournier** – Coordinator of the Conference at the European Parliament, Representative of Mutuelle Familiale (France)
- **Claude Rollin** – President of the Board of Directors of Mutualité chrétienne (Belgium)
- **Annie-Thébaud Mony** – Honorary Research Director at INSERM, Doctor of Humanities and Social Sciences, founder and researcher of GISCOP 93 (Scientific Interest Group on Occupational Cancers), president of the association Henri Pézerat health work environment, spokesperson for the Ban Asbestos France network

We remain at your disposal for further information or interview.

Warm regards.



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