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CMD Unveils Documents Detailing Insidious PR Campaign to “Greenwash” Weed-Killer Polluting Drinking Water Across the Country

Syngenta’s PR Team Investigated the Press and Paid “Experts” to Shape the News and Counter Scientific Claims of Potential Endocrine Disruption

Madison – Today, the Center for Media and Democracy posted more than 200 emails, invoices and other documents unsealed as part of a major lawsuit against Syngenta Crop Protection, Inc., the primary manufacturer of the weed-killer "atrazine."

“These documents reveal a multi-million dollar effort by Syngenta and its PR flaks to influence the public’s perception of atrazine in an effort to stave off regulatory and legal action against the weed-killer, which has been found in drinking water across the nation. As part of this greenwashing effort, Syngenta’s PR team investigated the press and paid scientists, economists and other ‘experts’ to spin the media and the public on the ‘benefits’ of atrazine,” said Lisa Graves, Executive Director of the Center for Media and Democracy.

The Holiday Shores Sanitary District vs. Syngenta and Growmark Inc. lawsuit was filed in 2006 and is still in the pre-trial stage. Holiday Shores is a small, lakeside community located in Madison County, Illinois, surrounded by farm fields. When the community’s water was found to be contaminated with atrazine, officials were worried about new scientific evidence linking atrazine to endocrine disruptive effects. They sought to upgrade their drinking water filtration system to extract the weed-killer only to find the upgrade prohibitively expensive. In this groundbreaking lawsuit, the community seeks financial help from the multi-billion dollar Swiss manufacturer to protect the public health.

Atrazine is primarily used by corn, sorghum, and sugarcane farmers, but it is also used on some

tree farms and golf courses. The weed-killer can easily run off into rivers, streams, and lakes, and it has been found in 94 percent of the U.S. water supply. Recent investigations show that the levels of the weed-killer can spike during the year, but that the company and the EPA did not alert the public. An increasing number of studies link the chemical to hormonal disruption and gender changes in laboratory animals.

The documents reveal a coordinated effort to “rattle cages” at the EPA and influence the media, potential jurors, farmers and politicians. Tactics used by the PR team include investigating critics, such as Danielle Ivory of the Huffington Post, creating a “Benefits Panel,” made up of supposedly independent experts to counter-spin negative press, and paying a Fox media pundit, scientists, economists, and other third party actors to carry their message on atrazine without disclosing that financial relationship to the public in their broadcast interviews. Invoices show, one ‘expert’ Richard Fawcett, the president of Fawcett Consulting and member of Syngenta’s Benefits Panel, received at least \$30 million over 15 years.

Documents Available

The package of materials being released today by CMD include new analysis by CMD reporters and previously sealed court documents:

- 1) [Syngenta PR’s Atrazine Spin Machine: Investigating the Press and Shaping the "News"](#) by CMD’s Beau Hodai and Lisa Graves documents the PR team’s investigation of the press, public interest groups and charitable foundations, along with the team’s tactics to pay and deploy third parties to counter negative press and spin the public.
- 2) [Atrazine: A "Molecular Bull in a China Shop"](#) by CMD’s Rebekah Wilce reviews emerging scientific evidence as well as claims that the chemical cannot be phased out, as it has been in Europe and in organic farming.
- 3) [Syngenta's Paid Third Party Pundits Spin the "News" on Atrazine](#) by CMD’s Sara Jerving. Jerving identified many of Syngenta’s surrogate talking heads and some of the payments they have received according to invoices.
- 4) Unsealed court documents can be accessed on [CMD’s SourceWatch site](#).

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[The Center for Media and Democracy](#) is a non-profit investigative reporting group whose work aids public awareness about the people, companies, and groups attempting to shape the media and our democracy. Founded in 1993, our national reporting and analysis focus on exposing corporate spin. We accept no funding from for-profit corporations or the government. The Center for Media and Democracy's websites are [PR Watch](#), [SourceWatch](#), [BanksterUSA](#), [ALECexposed](#) and [Food Rights Network](#).



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