



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Cindy Duehring (USA)†

(1997)



Cindy Duehring

...for putting her personal tragedy at the service of humanity by helping others understand and combat the risks posed by toxic chemicals.

Cindy Duehring was born in Bismarck, North Dakota, in 1962. A promising student, she was training to become a doctor when, in 1985, she was severely poisoned by a gross misapplication of pesticides in her apartment. This caused her to develop a vulnerability to seizures upon low level exposure to chemicals that became so acute that she could not leave her sealed, filtered house built of non-toxic material on a remote slope in the North Dakota grasslands, because breathing unpurified air triggered a bronchial shutdown. Visitors had to follow an exhaustive cleansing routine to avoid bringing pollutants into her home.

In 1986 Duehring founded the Environmental Access Research Network (EARN) of which she was Director. In 1994 it merged with and became the research division of the Chemical Injury Information Network (CIIN). CIIN is a support and advocacy organisation for the benefit of the chemically injured with over 5,000 members in 35 countries. Its primary focus is education, credible multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) research, and the empowerment of the chemically injured.

With one of the largest private libraries on chemical health issues in existence, EARN's main task was to make scientific, medical, legal and government literature available to healthcare professionals, expert witnesses, attorneys, and laypeople. Through EARN, Cindy Duehring wrote and published *Environmental Access Profiles* and the bi-monthly newsletter *Medical & Legal Briefs: A Referenced Compendium of Chemical Injury*.

Considered one of the leading organisations in the world in this field, CIIN/EARN works with healthcare professionals and governments in many countries, and the United Nations Environment Programme and the European Union have both recognised CIIN/EARN's work. In 1991, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry designated CIIN a clearinghouse to aid communities and individuals on the toxic health effects associated with low levels of chemical exposure.

In 1994 CIIN/EARN initiated the steering committee for the National Coalition for the Chemically Injured. In 1996 CIIN/EARN initiated the MCS Research Fund, which is dedicated to funding peer-reviewed research into the physiological causes of MCS. After Cindy Duehring's death, the Fund was renamed The Cindy Duehring MCS Research Fund. CIIN/EARN is a non-profit organisation that receives no government funding and operates primarily on private donations.

The aim of Duehring's work was to stimulate society to reassess the impact of the more than 75,000 synthetic chemicals in common use, concerning which there is very limited human toxicity testing. Many consumer products are protected by laws on trade secrecy and go virtually unregulated. Exposure to neurotoxins is one of the top ten causes of illness and injury in the US workforce, and

the National Academy of Sciences estimated that indoor air pollution contributes from \$15 billion to \$1000 billion annually to national healthcare costs. The costs in terms of human suffering are incalculable.

In 1994 Duehring received the Resourceful Woman Leadership Award.

Cindy Duehring died in 1999.

Quotation

"Short-term profits can short-change our future. ... The cost of ignoring the chemical effects on human health is quietly but steadily growing ever higher, creating a dangerous risk to the very underpinnings of society."

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