



**We stand for stewardship and innovation**

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representing Canada's plant science industry

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**Who We Are**

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**WE STAND FOR: Stewardship**

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**WE STAND FOR: Innovation**

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**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q.** Who regulates pesticides?

**A.** Pesticides are one of the most intensely researched, tested and regulated chemicals in Canada. Health Canada's stringent regulatory system ensures pesticides pose no unacceptable risk to human health and the environment. All pest control products used in or imported to Canada are regulated nationally under Health Canada's Pest Control Products Act (PCPA) and Regulations.

Before being registered for use in Canada, Health Canada requires all pesticides to undergo extensive health, environmental and value studies. Only products that are safe when used properly and provide their intended benefits are approved for registration in Canada. The entire development process for any given active ingredient consists of up to 200 different tests and studies. It can take up to 10 years to complete and can cost in excess of \$100 million CAD to develop and register a single active ingredient. In addition to the federal government's rigorous regulatory system, some provinces further regulate pesticides.

**Q.** Why are pesticides used?

**A.** Pesticide products provide enormous benefits to society. Farmers use pesticides to protect crops from damage by weeds, bacteria, fungi and other organisms and to help ensure that a variety of safe, appealing, affordable fruits, vegetables, and grains are available to Canadians. If not properly managed, insects, weeds, fungi and other organisms can affect the quality and quantity of the food we enjoy today. Pesticides help homeowners to control noxious and harmful insects and maintain comfortable outdoor spaces.

**Q.** Why do we need pesticides?

**A.** Today's pesticides are vital and deliver far-reaching benefits that include:

- protecting crops from diseases and weeds that can destroy entire crops and threaten our food supplies
- protecting animals and people from illness caused by disease-carrying insects and vermin (e.g. malaria and West Nile Virus);
- enabling us to feed a growing world population; and
- controlling noxious and harmful insects and maintaining comfortable outdoor spaces.

**Q.** Are pesticides safe?

**A.** A great many products including pesticides must be used with great care. Our products can be safely used when label directions are followed. This approach is also consistent with consumer products such as household cleaners, disinfectants and pharmaceuticals, which can also be used safely when label directions are followed.

**Q.** How do we know that a pesticide approved for use today won't be found to have negative health/environmental consequences in the future?

**A.** The Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) conducts its evaluations using the most stringent standards and most recent scientific approaches, to ensure pesticides approved for use pose no unacceptable risk to human health or the environment. In fact, under Canada's Pest Control Products Act, a pesticide can only be registered if there is "reasonable certainty that no harm to human health, future generations or the environment will result the pesticide is used as directed".

The PMRA also has a program in place to systematically re-evaluate older pesticides to ensure that they meet current-day standards. Regulatory action is taken on any product that is found to result in an unacceptable risk of harm. In addition, whenever scientific approaches emerge that can enhance the assessment process, the PMRA integrates this new knowledge into pesticide risk assessments.

**Q.** Is children's health taken into consideration?

**A.** Canada's regulatory system takes into consideration whether there is a possibility that children are exposed to pesticides. Exposure assessment includes factors such as a child's size, diet and child-specific activities that may lead to increased exposure, including putting their hands in their mouth or crawling on a surface that might be contaminated. Scientists and regulators require these additional margins of safety to protect children before any pesticide can be sold in Canada.

**Q.** Shouldn't we be really careful and apply the precautionary principle?

**A.** Canada's regulatory system for pesticides uses a precautionary approach that provides a stringent standard of protection to human health and the environment. Under the Pest Control Products Act, a pesticide can only be registered (and remain registered) for use in Canada if any associated risks to health or the environment have been determined to be acceptable. There must be reasonable certainty that no harm to human health, future generations or the environment will result when the pesticide is used as directed. As stated by the PMRA, this approach provides a significantly higher level of protection from risk of harm than does the approach of acting only to address threats of 'serious or irreversible damage', as required by the precautionary principle.

**Q.** Some doctors' organizations like the Ontario College of Family Physicians and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment have published reports raising questions about the safety of pesticides and as a result have called for bans on pesticide use especially by homeowners. Shouldn't we heed their findings and recommendations?

**A.** Canada has a comprehensive regulatory system to protect Canadians. In the case of pesticides, a product is acceptable for use only after demonstrating that it does not cause any unacceptable health risk. The system is effective because of rigorous review processes whereby all the applicable science is examined to ensure the best and most evidentiary decision on what is safe and what is not. Many different types of research studies are conducted to help regulators assess if there are any potential health effects related to pesticides. In the case of the Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) review, there were significant flaws found in the report. Scientists within the PMRA and elsewhere have carefully reviewed the OCFP report. As indicated by the PMRA, the report did not consider "all or even most of the relevant epidemiology evidence". In fact, the OCFP ignored a large body of extremely important and widely recognized research.

**Q.** Shouldn't we ban pesticides just like we banned smoking?

**A.** Health Canada registers these products once it has been demonstrated that there is no unacceptable risk of human health impacts when used according to label instructions and markings.

Unlike smoking, there are no studies that link pesticide exposure to cancer.

**Q.** Do pesticides cause cancer?

**A.** There are no studies which link pesticide exposure to cancer. In fact, health experts - from the Dietitians of Canada to the Canadian Cancer Society - consistently advocate a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and grains as one of the best ways to prevent cancer and heart disease. Pesticides are an important tool that allows us to grow an affordable, abundant food supply of fruit and vegetables.

**Q.** Is there a link between 2,4-D and cancer?

**A.** The PMRA has indicated that a number of studies from the United States, New Zealand and Australia report no association between 2,4-D and soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma or Hodgkin's.

**Q.** Why should I use pesticides on my lawn or garden? What's wrong with a few weeds?

**A.** Through careful, planned use of lawn care products, proper mowing and water practices, healthy turf offers many benefits: increasing property values; preventing soil erosion; reducing allergens and the likelihood of insect bites and stings; controlling dust and pollen from weeds and grasses; absorbing pollutants from the air and reducing noise.

**Q.** Isn't it true that we are finding contaminants in our blood like pesticides?

**A.** The ability to detect minute traces of chemicals - as small as parts per trillion, which is the equivalent to one second in 32,000 years - make it likely that trace amounts of multiple natural and synthetic chemicals can now be found in people. While this information is helpful, when detected at this level, it does not necessarily raise concerns about human health. As indicated by Health Canada, exposure to relatively small amounts of a chemical does not necessarily result in a negative health effect, particularly if the levels are very small.

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