

# Pesticide poisons pets

## Cosmetic variety may beautify your lawn, but it puts health at risk

BY CORRY ANDERSON-FENNELL, SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE MAY 9, 2010

You wouldn't lick pesticide off your fingers, but pets lick it off their paws every spring.

"Cosmetic pesticides used to kill weeds are highly toxic, and if your dog or cat steps on grass that's been treated with pesticides, the next time he licks his paws he is ingesting poison, plain and simple," says Craig Naherniak, general manager of humane education for the B.C. SPCA. "They don't wear shoes and they can't read 'keep off the grass' signs."

Cosmetic pesticides are used to make lawns and gardens attractive, at the expense of human and animal health, says Naherniak, noting that more than 25 B.C. municipalities -- including Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, Maple Ridge, Whistler and Kelowna -- have adopted bylaws to ban cosmetic pesticide use due to the risks to human and animal health.

The World Health Organization and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have published studies regarding the carcinogenicity of pesticides and the related risk of cancer.

"Imagine a mother robin pulling a pesticide-covered worm from your lawn and feeding it to her newly hatched offspring. We often don't think about the impact pesticides have on our pets or wild animals, who are part of our communities."

The B.C. SPCA has joined with the Canadian Cancer Society and Toxic Free Canada in calling for a ban on cosmetic pesticides in B.C. The ban would encompass private lawns as well as sports fields and golf courses.

But until there is a ban in place, pet guardians should take care to protect little Fluffy and Fido from the dangers lurking on the blades of lush, green grass.

"It's almost impossible to completely shield pets from exposure because you never really know which neighbour used what and where," says Naherniak. "You just have to take care to wash and wipe their paws when they come in from outside."

Naherniak recommends paying particular attention to between the pads where substances can become trapped in fur, and the undersides of claws, where chemicals can also become embedded.

But what about on your own lawn? Naherniak doesn't treat his lawn with any cosmetic pesticides; if you can't bear to have the neighbours glare at you during the next block party, he suggests consulting the Canadian Cancer Society's brochure, "UTurn for Change", for a list of low-toxicity and benign pesticide alternatives and other ideas.

Here are some of the brochure's recommendations:

-Consider planting ground cover instead of a grass lawn;

-Use organic compost for a healthier lawn that is more resistant to pests and disease;

- Choose native plants that suit local conditions so that you don't have to help them grow by artificial means;
- Add organic matter to your lawn by allowing your clippings to compost;
- Mow high and mow often, and water deeply but infrequently.

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