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Citizens want a ban on pesticides

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Commentary

When it comes to lawn and garden pesticides - the chemicals used to kill homeowners' weeds and bugs - the people of New Brunswick and the province's health experts are in agreement: The use and sale of these products should be prohibited.

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AP

In this Sept. 3, 1997 file photo, warning signs are attached to a barbed wire fence that surrounds the site of the Woolfolk pesticide plant then-under construction in Fort Valley, Ga.. Fifty of the country's most polluted and hazardous waste sites have been picked by federal environmental officials to receive a half-billion dollars of stimulus money.

New Brunswickers' concerns are well-placed. A growing body of scientific evidence suggests exposure to pesticides puts people at greater risk for cancer, neurological illness (such as Parkinson's disease), and birth defects. For example, a study written by doctors and published in the prestigious journal *Paediatrics & Child Health* (April, 2006) examined the medical effects of the most common weed-killer in Canada, 2,4-D. The study found that "2,4-D can be persuasively linked to cancers, neurological impairment and reproductive problems."

The Ontario College of Family Physicians, which represents 9,000 family doctors, released a landmark study on pesticides and human health in April, 2004. It found, among other things, that children exposed to pesticides had an increased risk of acute leukemia, "especially for exposure to insecticides and herbicides used on lawns, fruit trees and gardens, and for indoor control of insects."

Based on their scientific findings, the doctors concluded that people should "avoid exposure to all pesticides whenever and wherever possible."

The science is strong enough that New Brunswick's most respected health organizations, including the Canadian Cancer Society and the New Brunswick Lung Association, support a provincial ban on both cosmetic pesticide use and sales. These organizations also know that a pesticide-free property can be attractive. In fact, it's precisely by dropping toxic chemicals and opting for biodiversity and natural plant care that we create the healthy, balanced ecosystems on which beautiful lawns and gardens depend.

The experts know, too, that non-toxic lawn care involves such things as improving the soil and diversifying plant life around the lawn. Therefore it is good for the economy through payment for labour and for material from plant nurseries and garden centres.

Experience in other communities shows that after pesticide restrictions are brought in, the number of local lawn care firms actually increases. In the five years following Halifax's pesticide ban, for example, the number of landscaping companies in the city grew 53 per cent, from 118 to 180, according to Statistics Canada. The number of employees in the industry went up as well. There is every reason to believe a New Brunswick pesticide ban will mean similar benefits for local workers and business.

To its credit, the Graham government has said it will introduce new pesticide regulations this spring. A provincial ban on the sale and use of pesticides for lawn care and landscape purposes would be good news for our drinking water, our pets, and the economy. Most important of all, it would be good news for our children.

Recent polling done by Ipsos Reid shows nearly eight out of 10 New Brunswickers (79 per cent) support a provincial ban on pesticides used for purely "cosmetic" or non-essential purposes. The survey also says more than three out of four residents (76 per cent) support a ban on the products' sale.

What brought citizens to this position?

Likely it's their belief that lawn pesticides threaten the most important things in their lives, their children, their pets, and the environment. Ipsos found 85 per cent of New Brunswickers see pesticides as a potential health risk to pets and animals, while 80 per cent see these chemicals as a risk to humans and the environment.

"This belief is consistently strong across all age and gender segments as well as among both those who own and rent their home," Ipsos noted in its survey report.

But it's also clear the pesticide industry is working to kill new regulations or severely weaken them. To ensure a ban is passed quickly and truly protects us, the province's health organizations are asking citizens to call or e-mail their MLA with a simple message: "This spring, please pass the strongest ban on lawn pesticide use and sales."

Sending that message today is one of the very best things you can do to protect your family's health.

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