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Time for city to look at pesticide policy

By Paul Hanley, The StarPhoenix March 9, 2010

It used to be it was just a bunch of hippies and the rogue scientists who opposed pesticides. Now groups like the Canadian Cancer Society, physicians' organizations and local and provincial governments are at the forefront of a growing movement to ban non-essential uses of these dangerous products.

The movement against "cosmetic" pesticides, which started in Hudson, Que., in the early 1990s, is the topic of *A Chemical Reaction*, a film to be shown March 16 at 7 p.m. in the auditorium of City Hospital. The Canadian Cancer Society and the Saskatchewan Environmental Society are sponsoring the local premiere. Admission is by donation. You can watch the trailer for the award-winning film at www.cancer.ca/sk.

In addition to the film showing, there will be a question and answer session with Paul Tukey, an organic lawn care expert who is also executive producer of the film. Tukey will also be selling and signing copies of his popular book, *The Organic Lawn Care Manual*.

The film shows how Hudson became the first municipality in North America to ban cosmetic pesticides. That community's efforts were strenuously opposed by the pesticide and chemical lawn care industries, who challenged the right of a municipality to ban the use of substances that are allowed by national regulations. The case ultimately reached the Supreme Court of Canada, which ruled that municipalities do have that right.

The cosmetic ban movement has since spread throughout Canada and now to the United States, with hundreds of municipalities banning cosmetic uses of garden chemicals.

Quebec and, more recently, Ontario have now passed provincewide bans on cosmetic pesticides, and B.C. is also under pressure to do the same. Interestingly, the pressure is coming not just from the environmental groups; in 2008, B.C. mayors and councillors passed a collective resolution asking the provincial government to implement a provincewide ban. The support was overwhelming -- only a single delegate voted against the motion.

According to Statistics Canada, pesticide bans work. In Quebec, the number of households with a lawn or garden using chemical pesticides dropped dramatically to just four per cent in 2007, one year after provincial regulations prohibiting the use and sale of many lawn pesticides were fully implemented. By comparison, in B.C., which does not yet have a provincewide ban in place, 25 per cent of households with a lawn or garden still use chemical pesticides.

Groups such as the Canadian Cancer Society reason that there is sufficient evidence to link pesticides to cancers and other diseases that it is unwise to continue to use these chemicals without a good reason. Just to make your yard look pretty or to avoid hand weeding is not a good enough reason to spread poisons around in the environment and risk people's health.

The pesticide bans do not prohibit use of pesticides in commercial agriculture and forestry, for businesses such as golf courses or for the control of dangerous organisms such as West Nile virus or poison ivy.

Pesticide bans have not been as popular in the Prairies, although Brandon enacted one in 2006 and Saskatoon, Regina and Calgary have flirted with the idea. Several years ago, Regina and Saskatoon considered bans but rejected them in favour of a public education approach.

Pesticides are widely used in Saskatchewan. Approximately \$700 million is spent on in excess of 10 million kilograms of pesticides on farms, 10 kg sprayed for each resident of the province. What is interesting is that pesticides are applied at much higher rates (three to five times more per hectare) in cities than on farms.

Cosmetic pesticide use in Saskatchewan has been on the rise since 1994, when 37 per cent of households used pesticides, to 2005, when 43 per cent used pesticides. During the same time, Quebecers cut their use of pesticides in half as municipal bans expanded, with pesticide use dropping much further after the provincial ban went into effect. Pesticide use in Canada is highest in Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Regina.

Perhaps it is time for Saskatoon to re-examine its pesticide use policy. It appears that education is ineffective, whereas regulation is.

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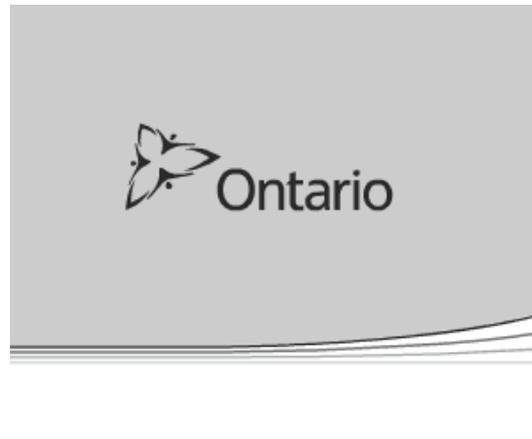
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