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Op-Ed: Time for Manitoba to join six other Canadian provinces banning lawn pesticides

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Six Canadian provinces have taken measures to protect their citizens from the harms of chemical pesticides. Surely, Manitobans, and their children in particular, also deserve to be protected from environmental and health threats posed by non-essential pesticides used on lawns and gardens. This question is at the forefront of discussion in Manitoba right now and the province has an obligation to give its citizens the protection they deserve.

We encourage Premier Greg Selinger and Conservation Minister, Gord Mackintosh, to make a decision, supported by science and health research, to ban the sale of cosmetic pesticides in Manitoba. A ban now is crucial to eliminating their use and protecting children and the environment.

Manitoba should adopt a comprehensive ban on both pesticide use and sale as half measures would continue to leave Manitobans at risk. British Columbia, for example still allows licensed sprayers to use these poisons, but their use should be off-limits to everyone. A license, unfortunately, does not make pesticides any less toxic or change how they affect someone who ingests them. A ban is clear, simple and effective.

And, it's supported by Manitobans. A recent public opinion poll found that over 70 per cent of Manitobans support a ban.

Manitoba has the opportunity to join Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, all of whom have brought in restrictions in the last decade. The bans vary from province to province, with Ontario and Nova Scotia providing the most health protection to its citizens. These are the provinces Manitoba should look to in creating its own ban.

The campaign to ban the use and sale of lawn and garden pesticides also has support from the Canadian Cancer Society and other prominent health organizations as part of a strategy to reduce environmental exposures to carcinogens. Studies reviewed by the Ontario College of Family Physicians show these chemicals are linked to serious illnesses such as cancer,

reproductive problems and neurological diseases, including Parkinson's. Children, who are closer to the ground with bodies that are still developing, are particularly vulnerable.

In addition to human health risks, pesticides also threaten bees and other pollinators that are essential to our food supply. In economic terms, the value of pollination for Canadian food crops has been conservatively estimated at \$1.2 billion a year. Even small amounts of certain pesticides are known to affect bee longevity, memory, navigation and foraging abilities. Pesticides still in use in Canada have been shown to be harmful to birds, fish and other wildlife.

The unnecessary use of pesticides also puts an undue strain on our already overburdened environment. Many pesticides accumulate in lakes and rivers. Lake Winnipeg was recently declared one of the most threatened lakes in the world. We cannot afford to put further pressures on this fragile ecosystem.

Lawn pesticides put our health and environment at risk unnecessarily: well proven alternatives exist. Organic gardening techniques and alternative products are effective and widely available. Practices such as mowing high, over-seeding, and topdressing are easy ways to restore ecological soil health. Effective natural products such as corn gluten meal and nematodes are widely available from retailers and lawn care service providers. And these alternatives have been shown to be good for business. Statistics Canada shows that the horticultural trades have increased dramatically in number and size in Toronto and Halifax following the adoption of pesticide bylaws.

Bans work. In other provinces, such as Quebec, they have brought dramatic reductions in pesticide use within short time periods. In Ontario, urban stream studies before and after their ban show some pesticide concentrations were reduced by over 90 per cent.

Manitobans take great pride in maintaining their properties: the good news is that a ban will allow them to continue to do that and not risk their children's health and the environment in the process. In a world filled with multiple chemical exposures and risks, Manitoba has the option to move forward by removing needless risks posed by lawn pesticides' use and sale. Health experts and scientists urge the province to ban these toxic products at the earliest possible date.

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