

# Spray doesn't pose any human health risk: Strang

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Nova Scotia's chief public health officer Dr. Robert Strang is firing back over health concerns surrounding the province's approval for the application of a controversial herbicide.

Last week, Nova Scotia Environment gave the green light to Northern Pulp and three other companies to spray more than 2,600 hectares of woodland in Colchester, Cumberland, Hants and Pictou counties with VisionMax, which contains the chemical glyphosate.

Glyphosate is also the ingredient in Monsanto's popular weed-killer Round-Up, and has received scrutiny from environment and health advocates since it came to market in the 1970s.

Recently, Halifax's Ecology Action Centre and MLAs such as Lenore Zann of the NDP have spoken out against glyphosate's application in the province citing environmental and health concerns.

The spraying campaign has also received significant attention on social media, and a Change.org petition calling on the provincial government to halt the spraying in Nova Scotia has attracted more than 1,300 signatures.

On Friday, Strang issued a statement saying that there is "no evidence" that glyphosate creates a risk to human health if used properly.

"Even water can be toxic if too much is consumed in a short period of time," he said in the release.

Speaking with The Chronicle Herald on Monday, Strang said although the World Health Organization has identified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen under certain conditions, Health Canada has ruled that glyphosate is not a health risk to humans so long as it is properly applied.

“To determine the actual risk you have to ask exactly how is the chemical going to be used — when, how, where, and how much — and work all that through in a risk assessment to say what’s the possible human exposure and what are the health risks from that exposure,” he said.

“All the evidence would say that the way it is proposed to be used in Nova Scotia for forestry application does not pose any human health risk.”

Strang went on to cite a recent New Brunswick study with similar findings.

Strang said it’s about weighing risks and benefits.

“There are significant potential benefits for this which ultimately contributes to human health in terms of a vibrant forestry industry that employs people, we know income and employment are significant contributors to health,” he said.

Strang noted that in the past he has spoken in support of banning pesticides — including glyphosate — for cosmetic use in lawns and gardens.

Though glyphosate has been banned in a number of countries, it is approved for a wide variety of commercial applications by Health Canada’s Pest Management Regulatory Agency. In Nova Scotia entities seeking to use pesticide treatment must get a permit through the the Department of Environment.

The province routinely approves the commercial application of glyphosate in woodlands to kill hardwood saplings that compete with young coniferous trees.

In Nova Scotia, herbicide use has not been eligible for public funding since December 2010. Glyphosate was one of a number of chemicals banned for cosmetic use by Nova Scotia in 2011.