

A chemical reaction was an inconvenient truth

Won battle to ban lawn chemicals

BY MONIQUE BEAUDIN, THE GAZETTE AUGUST 28, 2009

More than a decade ago, Paul Tukey, a landscaper from Maine, developed blurred vision, rashes, nausea and headaches. Doctors eventually told him his condition was being caused by exposure to lawn chemicals such as 2,4-D that he used daily.

The diagnosis changed his life. He closed his business and began working to promote safer lawns. While researching a book about organic lawn care, Tukey came across the story of a tiny Quebec town that took on the multi-billion dollar lawn-chemical industry - and won.

Tonight, *A Chemical Reaction*, a documentary Tukey produced about Hudson's David vs. Goliath struggle of its landmark pesticide bylaw and its impact across the continent, has its world premiere at the Montreal World Film Festival.

The film focuses on Hudson dermatologist June Irwin, who in 1985 began raising concerns about pesticide exposure after treating several people with health problems she believed were linked to lawn chemicals.

It was an uphill battle, but five years later then-mayor Michael Elliott and the town council enacted Canada's first pesticide bylaw banning the use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides. Two lawn-care companies fought the bylaw in court, and the case reached the Supreme Court. In 2001, the nine judges sided unanimously with Hudson.

Quebec and Ontario subsequently adopted regulations restricting the use of residential pesticides, and Hudson's bylaw has been the inspiration for many municipalities.

Tukey praised Irwin as an international environmental "hero" for raising the issue of the impact on health of lawn chemicals.

"This one woman really was the catalyst for this movement," he said in an interview yesterday. "There's no denying she was the first one, in a very public way, to stick her neck out there."

Tukey said he hopes to begin a dialogue about lawn chemicals the same way former U.S. vice-president Al Gore did with global warming and the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*.

A Chemical Reaction will be shown tonight at 5 p.m. at Quartier Latin Cinema, 350 Emery St., Saturday at 1:30 p.m. at the National Film Board Cinema, 1658 St. Denis St., and Monday at 7 p.m. at the NFB Cinema. Several Hudson residents, including Irwin and Elliott, are expected to attend Monday's screening.

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