

Will we ever learn the lesson on toxic chemicals?

EDMONTON JOURNAL JULY 19, 2011

Re: "City's green plan could cause 'bedlam' without reaching goal, developer warns," The Journal, July 14.

On July 13, city council caved in to bullying by the lawn-care industry and voted to delete references to the "precautionary principle" from the Way We Green document.

Dandelion killer 2,4-D is the most common weed killer used in lawn care. A study published in Paediatrics and Child Health in 2006 found 2,4-D "persuasively linked" to cancer, neurological impairment and reproductive problems.

The precautionary principle calls for pesticide manufacturers to prove their products are safe before being placed on the market, rather than putting the onus of proof on regulators such as the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency, whose information may be biased, based on confidential and proprietary animal studies provided by the industry itself.

Given 2,4-D's decades-long controversial history, precaution urges not using this chemical for non-essential, cosmetic purposes.

The lack of precautionary principle allowed the extensive use of Triclosan in liquid soaps, toothpaste and toys before U.S. Food and Drug Administration discovered "valid concerns" over thyroid issues and cancer.

DDT, hailed as an effective insecticide in 1939, was banned in most western countries in the '70s, but the World Health Organization waited until 2002 to classify it as a "persistent organic pollutant."

Nevertheless, proponents of DDT still choose to ignore its disastrous environmental effects for perceived benefits to humans.

Another "approved" and presumably harmless organic chemical was the phthalate bisphenol A (BPA). Canada took a decade longer than the European Union to force hormone-disrupting phthalates out of children's plastic products. Fetal development is still jeopardized by cytotoxic BPA crossing the placenta.

Linked to breast and prostate cancer, BPA is still found in food packaging, cash receipts and in the urine of 90 per cent of Canadians.

A Syngenta herbicide widely used by Alberta farmers contains atrazine as active ingredient. Renowned biologist Tyrone Hayes left his job as consultant for Syngenta to repeat his research and publish it in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

He found that atrazine, in concentrations lower than deemed acceptable for drinking water, disrupts endocrine production, effectively chemically castrating and feminizing male frogs.

Extensive findings point to possible connections to breast and prostate cancer and spontaneous abortions in humans.

Will we ever learn? There is definitely a call for the precautionary principle.

The City of Edmonton should prohibit non-essential use of pesticides on private and city property and reinstate the precautionary principle in The Way We Green. It's the least we can do.

Cecily Mills, PhD, microbiology, Edmonton

© Copyright (c) The Edmonton Journal