

News & Issues

## Canadian Cancer Society approaches spring with renewed effort to ban lawn care pesticides

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 LM Direct!

As surely as swallows return to San Juan Capistrano and buzzards to Hinckley, OH, spring signals a fresh wave of anti-lawn care activity in Canada. The message is a predictable as April showers, and it's always the same: Ban the use of lawn care chemicals.

The anti-pesticide drumbeat begins in mid-winter and intensifies as the snow and ice retreat. Typically, groups (the Canadian Cancer Society is always in the forefront) begin a publicity campaign to "educate" property owners to the alleged health risks of using or allowing lawn care chemicals to be used on their properties. Then, gaining the support of local (and vocal) activists, they build pressure on provincial or local lawmakers to outlaw law care chemicals, which they maintain have no purpose other than to make lawns more attractive.

This season anti-pesticide activity has been greatest in Alberta and British Columbia (BC) provinces in western Canada and, predictably, is being spearheaded by the Canadian Cancer Society, a national, community-based charitable organization of volunteers. It is Canada's largest national cancer charity. To date, a handful of communities in BC but no municipalities in Alberta have banned the use of lawn care chemicals.

Elsewhere in Canada, these campaigns have been surprisingly effective, especially in its most populous province, Ontario and neighboring Quebec Province, where the anti-lawn care movement began more than 10 years ago.

Most recently activists have turned their attention to the City of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta Province. As I write this, it is not clear whether this city of 730,000 people will ban pesticide use or not. Earlier this year a report from a city committee opined that pesticides bans are difficult to enforce, can add millions to the cost of park maintenance, allow green natural spaces to deteriorate and doesn't seem to lead to ill health affects.

Not unexpectedly, the report was heavily criticized by pesticide critics, but gave some hope to individuals and businesses that routinely use these products, many of which have been on the market for decades.

"What's wrong with having a beautiful, lush, green lawn? When did that become a criminal offence, to enjoy having pride in your property?" lawn care spokesman David Montgomery asked council's transportation and public works committee, reported the [Edmonton Journal](#) newspaper on Feb. 24.

Regardless, the Canadian Cancer Society claims it has overwhelming support from the public to ban "the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides" on home lawns. It continues to claim that research links pesticide exposure with an increased risk of both childhood and adult cancers. These include childhood and adult leukemia, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, prostate, brain and lung cancers. It also maintains that studies show that children may be at a higher risk due to their rapidly developing bodies.

Provide the proof, responded Lorne Hepworth, president of CropLife Canada. "As it stands now, the weight of scientific research proves that pesticides can be safely used and Canadians should feel comfortable if they choose to use them," he wrote in a letter to the [Terrace Standard](#) newspaper.

"If the Canadian Cancer Society has information to back up its pesticide claims it is irresponsibly squandering its efforts on municipal campaigns rather than presenting 'proof' to Health Canada, which regulates the products, or to the industry, which runs hundreds of tests on each and every product seeking federal government registration . . . if the Canadian Cancer Society had even a shred of relevant and compelling information Health Canada would be all over it."

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