



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

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Our position on pesticides

In Canada, pesticides are used for either cosmetic reasons (to improve the look of gardens, lawns and other green spaces) or non-cosmetic reasons (to protect our food and water supply, or to prevent the spread of disease). Our position on the use of pesticides depends on what they are being used for.

Our position on cosmetic use of pesticides

The Society calls for a ban on pesticides used to improve the appearance of green spaces. The cosmetic use of pesticides provides no health benefit, and may cause harm.

The precautionary principle

The evidence about pesticides and cancer is not definite, but some research studies show a stronger link between some types of pesticides and cancers. Our position is based on the precautionary principle, which states, “When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause-and-effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.” (If something may cause harm to humans or the environment, we should be cautious even if the link is not definite yet.) The Society supports the use of safer ways to maintain and improve the appearance of lawns, gardens, parks and other green spaces but does not support the use of [Integrated Pest Management](#) for cosmetic purposes.

Golf courses and sporting facilities

The Society wants the use of pesticides to be phased out at golf courses and sports facilities, especially where children often are, or if they are located next to residential and public areas.

Pesticides should be used as the last option, in the smallest possible amount, and only where needed to make a place usable. People should stay away from treated areas for at least 48 hours after the last amount of pesticide is applied.

Home fruit-and-vegetable gardens

The use of pesticides in home or personal fruit-and-vegetable gardens should also be phased out. Although the pesticides you use at home may be milder than those used for agriculture, and you may use them less often, there is still risk. In the agriculture business, there are usually more rules in place to reduce exposure, such as training for people who apply pesticides to properly use equipment that protects them, plans to reduce residue levels and pesticide drift, and rules to limit access to sprayed areas.

Our position on non-cosmetic use of pesticides

The Society believes that when pesticides are needed to protect our health, safety or food supply, they should be part of a plan that includes pest prevention, using pesticides in the lowest amounts possible and using safer choices.

The risks and benefits of the non-cosmetic use of pesticides should be judged depending on each situation. Where pesticides are necessary to protect our food supply or against the spread of disease, the Society recommends that:

- The choice of chemicals should take into account their potential long-term health effects, like the risk of developing cancer in later years.
- Widespread chemical spraying should be used only as a last option to protect human health and safety.
- If chemical spraying is needed, people must be warned about the risks and helped to protect vulnerable family members such as infants, elderly people and people with weak immune systems.
- Guidelines that are based on evidence should be set up to help people decide which chemical treatments to use.

Using pesticides in agriculture

We encourage farming practices that reduce the use of pesticides. The Society strongly believes that efforts to reduce the use of pesticides in agriculture need to be carefully balanced with efforts to protect:

- food security (the safety, quality, availability and cost of food)
- the health of Canadians
- the environment
- the economic stability of farmers and other food producers

Last modified on: 29 January 2013

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*Canada-wide
printed: 01 February 2013*

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