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## Give it a name, you define the issue

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It worked in P.E.I.

Bet it works here too.

The final push is on to convince the provincial government to ban pesticides used to keep lawns green and weed free.

And one of the weapons being used by ban fans is science.

Perfect.

There's a pattern to how you influence public policy.

Politicians and business people learned it long ago. It's why U.S. President George W. Bush hooked a ride on a fighter and landed on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in 2003.

It made him look like Tom Cruise in the movie "Top Gun". Well, maybe, just a little, little bit. If you squint really hard.

Bush flew to the carrier just off the coast of San Diego to claim the U.S. had accomplished its mission in Iraq. Oops. Bit premature. Bush is gone, but the Iraq war goes on.

Manipulating the press and public that way works, however. Bush got on TV, with lots of soldiers cheering his every word. Mission accomplished.

It's why Prime Minister Stephen Harper wore the blue sweater during the last election. It's less formal. More friendly. See, I'm one of the guys, just like you. Really.

Well, grassroots groups can play the same game. And now they do.

Just last month ban fans earned headlines when they released an opinion poll on what they call 'cosmetic' pesticides. Back to that phrase in a moment.

"A poll commissioned by the Canadian Cancer Society, the Lung Association of New Brunswick and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment suggests 79 per cent of people in the province would support a ban on those chemicals used to improve the look of lawns and gardens," the CBC reported. "The results...were similar to those found in a government report released in December."

The story quoted Gideon Forman, executive director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, as saying the Ipsos Reid poll done in December found 72 per cent of the New Brunswickers surveyed don't use pesticides.

"And then they asked people who do use pesticides, 'Would you be willing to switch if we showed you how to?'... most of those say yes they would," he said.

And the poll found of the 438 people surveyed, 47 per cent completely support a ban, 32 per cent mostly support one.

This has a very familiar ring to it.

In January of last year, the Canadian Cancer Society in Prince Edward Island did the same thing. It released a poll looking at public support for a ban.

"The poll, conducted by Corporate Research Associates Inc. in November 2007, surveyed 1,101 households in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. Of those surveyed, 69 per cent support a ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides, and 79 per cent believe pesticides used for lawn and garden maintenance have the potential to pose a health risk to people," the society said.

The eloquent Cancer Society's executive director for P.E.I. did interviews talking about the survey. There were headlines. It was perfect.

Perfect because the ban fans had learned the lessons of spin and applied them without a hitch.

- You need a cause people will support. Well, if pesticides can kill fish and fowl, they must be bad. Agent Orange, used to strip the leaves from trees during the Vietnam War, caused cancer. Ditto DDT.
- You need a good spokesperson from a credible group. Got it covered. Go ahead, pick on the Canadian Cancer Society, the Lung Association of New Brunswick and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. I dare you.
- And you need numbers, because numbers mean science. And science is tough to argue with, I mean, it has numbers on its side and they're so...mysterious.

The result in P.E.I.?

"The P.E.I. government intends to ban the sale of cosmetic pesticides starting in 2010," the CBC said last Monday. "Environment Minister Richard Brown told CBC News...that regulations are being drawn up and they will be straightforward."

"A ban is a ban. Those products will not be allowed to be sold on P.E.I.," he said.

And the icing on the cake?

When the P.E.I. legislature's standing committee on agriculture, forestry and environment issued its report supporting a ban issued its report, it said in part: "Research has shown that a ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides is most effective if it includes a ban on the sale of those pesticides."

'Cosmetic' pesticides.

Name the issue and you define the debate.

'Cosmetic pesticide' sounds so vain. And protecting our planet from needless poisons is so serious. We must do something. Now.

New Brunswick is expected to announce its decision this spring.

Mission accomplished.

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