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Doctors lobby for total B.C. ban of home pesticides

Group urges ban on chemicals applied for cosmetic purposes to lawns and gardens

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Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment say pesticides applied to residential lawns and gardens can lead to serious long-term health problems. (iStock)

A group of Canadian doctors and citizens concerned with rates of diseases thought to be caused by chemicals are calling on the B.C. government to institute a ban on all non-essential lawn and garden pesticides.

The 5,000 members of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment say exposure to pesticides can lead to serious long-term health problems, and are lobbying to change laws that still allow for their widespread cosmetic use.

CAPE's campaign began Tuesday with an open letter signed by over 100 doctors that is appearing in newspapers across the province. Gideon Foreman, the executive director of CAPE, says pesticides are all around us.

"Chemicals are used quite widely in many communities. They threaten kids, they threaten pets, and they threaten drinking water," Foreman said.

'Even if these chemicals are used by licensed people, they are dangerous. Just because you have a license it doesn't make a poison less poisonous.'

— Gideon Foreman, executive director of CAPE

Foreman said scientific studies show people exposed to pesticides are at a greater risk for cancer and neurological disease. CAPE explains on its website

that pesticides can lead to poisonings, both acute and chronic, and that some household insect killers contain organophosphates, which have been linked to neurological damage in humans. CAPE also says that epidemiologic studies have linked exposure to insecticides in the home to development of brain cancer and leukemia in children.

Last month, the province of B.C. introduced a bill that requires anyone using cosmetic pesticides to have a licence. Foreman says that law would still put people in danger.

"Our concern, as a doctor's association, is that these regulations won't protect children and they won't protect drinking water in B.C. Only a real ban will do that," Foreman said.

"Even if these chemicals are used by licensed people, they are dangerous. Just because you have a licence it doesn't make a poison less poisonous."

Foreman said he would like to meet with Terry Lake, B.C.'s Minister of Environment, to discuss implementing a ban on all toxic pesticides.

The ban CAPE is proposing would prohibit the use, sale, and retail display of chemical pesticides for lawns, gardens and non-agricultural landscaping, with exemptions allowed only in order to protect public health.

With files from the CBC's Farrah Merali