

B.C.'s proposed pesticide regulations won't protect children

by [Gideon Forman](#), [Warren Bell](#) on Mar 11, 2013 at 2:47 pm



On February 20, the B.C. government introduced a bill that will require everyone using pesticides on lawns and gardens to be licensed. The practical implication is that professional pesticide applicators will be able to spray weed-killers and insecticides on private residential property with impunity. The government suggests its proposed legislation will enhance public safety. We don't agree. We believe that [Bill 8](#) gives lawn companies, many of which are heavy users of pesticides, licence to spray at will.

The government seems to believe that if poisons are used by licensed personnel they are acceptable. This is nonsense. Pesticides pose very significant health risks for people and the environment no matter who sprays them. Poisons don't become benign just because the person using them has been instructed in their use.

Scientific research done by family physicians shows that people exposed to pesticides are at greater risk for brain cancer, prostate cancer, kidney cancer, and pancreatic cancer. The science also shows that pesticide use is linked to neurological diseases such as Alzheimer and Parkinson's. Children exposed to these chemicals are more likely to contract leukemia. Women exposed to high

levels of pesticides during pregnancy are more likely to have a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and reduced IQ. Exposed children are also at increased risk for asthma. If pesticides are now implicated in the rise of these tragic childhood ailments, it should concern us all.

The Ministry of Environment says its new bill will “ensure cosmetic pesticides are being used safely and responsibly”. This misses the point. Pesticides cannot be made safe. They are designed to kill; that’s what their “-cide” suffix is all about. The government is misleading British Columbians by appearing to enhance public health when in fact it is not.

The only way to protect British Columbians is to reduce synthetic lawn pesticide usage to zero. But Bill 8 won’t do this. And it makes no mention of a future phase-out. On the contrary, it sets out conditions (namely licensing) that will allow companies to spray these chemicals in perpetuity.

Is it practical to ban lawn-pesticide use by all parties? Ontario certainly thinks so. It has had a comprehensive prohibition in this area since 2009 and the law is working extremely well. Retailers are now selling non-toxic products and lawn-care firms are making good money offering pesticide-free services. Some are even creating new jobs because organic landscaping is more labour-intensive than its chemical counterpart.

Ontario’s ban is also proving to be very helpful environmentally. Research done by the province found that, following the legislation’s implementation, concentrations of lawn pesticides in urban streams dropped dramatically. In some waterways, for example, the amount of 2,4-D weed-killer was down 94 percent.

B.C. should scrap this bill and instead legislate a true ban—one that would require both homeowners and lawn companies to use kid-friendly, non-toxic products. To bring that point home, this week the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and its partners are launching a provincewide advertising campaign. The ads feature the names of over 100 doctors and nurses who support a strong pesticide prohibition.

If we want to protect our kids—not to mention our lakes, drinking water, and beloved family pets—we need to listen to our health professionals. And the latter are saying with one firm and credible voice: “Ban the use and sale of lawn pesticides across B.C.”

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