

Kelowna B.C. Prohibition of Pest Control Products. Part 1.

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Claims about pesticides not backed up

February 24th, 2009

Kelowna Capital News

To the editor:

With all due respect to the great work that The Canadian Cancer Society does, my conscience will not permit me to leave their and Ms. Kiely's opinions unchallenged. (Best to Keep Away from Pesticides, Feb. 8 Capital News)

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It bothers me that her statements are so generalized and look to me to be somewhat unsubstantiated. With admitted little research to the effects of herbicides and pesticides and links to cancer she is willing to support a ban on their use because they "maybe, can, might or could" cause us all to die of cancer.

The chemicals she fears have been developed under close scrutiny to be safely applied for specific problems and she really doesn't have real evidence to the contrary. Better safe than sorry does not address the bigger picture as to why these products were developed in the first place. I fully support safer alternatives but the truth is they don't work very well. I believe integrated pest management and education are the answer, not a ban out of fear of the unknown.

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I would like a definition of "cosmetic" because, as someone involved in farming, I am very aware of the effects of back yard breeding grounds for pests that have already threatened food crops like cherries and apples. Does the Ipsos Reid poll consider this or is it like most other polls where the results are determined by the question.

I also find it disturbing that she has implied our food producers are poisoning us with chemical residues and that I don't have the common sense or ability to safely apply domestic products to my yard or garden.

I am completely behind increased education and the use of alternatives and like most people who bear the burden of destroying the environment and killing family and friends, have been using those alternatives for years and am always looking for new ones. I have lost friends and family to cancer but not once has anyone been able to tell me the cause. 3 of 18.

I can't support a ban based on fear and supposition. It's not as much that the industry is right but more that you have no proof you are, but are willing to go to extremes anyway.

It's been said that when people are afraid the first things they are willing to sacrifice are freedom and common sense. What should we ban next? Cometics, lawns, gardens, cars, plastic, concrete. They all have their bad points and maybe, might ,can cause cancer among other things.

Bob Everatt, Kelowna

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Letter: All pesticides are poisonous

February 19th, 2009

The Kelowna Daily Courier
The Vernon Daily Courier

Re: Jeffrey Lowes' letters defending the pesticide industry on Feb. 6 and 8.

I am retired intelligence analyst, currently an honorary Canadian observer on the Pesticide Working Group based in Washington, D.C.

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Mr. Lowes tells us that he is the "principle" investigator for MREP Communications. In fact, he is not investigating any principles, but is a principal, i.e. main investigator for his company.

The qualifications of the unspecified experts he refers to are quite dubious. Who are they? Laymen, like himself, with an axe to grind? Surely, a medical doctor he is ridiculing should be able to assess the situation intelligently.

I beg to differ with Mr. Lowes that only some pesticides are poisons. They all are, to a lesser and greater degree. After all the "cide" means kill. When applied by so-called professionals, these synthetic chemicals are no less deadly.

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Moreover, the mere fact that these products are registered with Health Canada means little. Health Canada has no labs of its own. Only the so-called active portion of pesticides is tested by the industry. The inert portion is untested, even though it may comprise as much as 99 per cent of the ready-to-use product.

Pesticides are tested on rats which have decontamination genes missing in humans. The industry doesn't test pesticides for human neurotoxicity, vital development toxicity, endocrine (hormone) disruption and routine contamination by dioxin.

The reputation of the lawn-care industry would benefit from an open mind and a willingness to keep up with the times, embracing new, effective methods of lawn maintenance.

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Science is not a person and thus cannot dictate the course of action. Science is merely a tool to be used or misused. Yes, indeed the Earth is not flat and by the same token, pesticides are no longer sacred.

There is nothing wrong with taking pride in one's lawn. I do. I am not exaggerating by saying that my weedless, pesticide-free lawn is the envy of my immediate neighbourhood.

K. Jean Cottam,
Nepean, Ont.

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Editorial, Pesticide industry must stop denials

February 8th, 2009

Kelowna Daily Courier. Letter to the editor.

Re: The Okanagan, Sunday, Feb. 1

The credibility of our industry is always questioned, as should almost any information presented on any subject. Media is given license to write anything unrestricted as the voice of the public psyche. But with that license there is the responsibility to be objective. 6 of 18.

Had the reporter – or in this case the city editor – reviewed the facts presented to sway the public perception, they may have been a little more objective in their writing.

Just as in the cases of newspaper stories that present false medical reports as fact, or of individuals with delusions of adequacy that claimed to be medical doctors, this should not be equated to the lack of competence within the media as a whole.

Although the editor attributes the “verbal garbage” on this issue to us, it actually flows from the annals of one side. Rat poison is what it is – a poison – and it is also a pesticide. There are no “natural” products to remove the evasive weeds and insects from our landscape. So, yes, some pesticides are poisons.

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What is your point, other than an attempt to disparage the reputation of the lawn and tree care industry? Products used by the industry and in the hands of a professional are safe. The lawn- and tree-care industry has four pillars in their use of products to provide their goods and services. One: the product has to be registered with Health Canada. Two: the product has to work. Three: the products and methods have to be cost effective. Four: use should not increase their carbon footprint.

Regardless of whether the product is natural or not, science – and not public opinion – will dictate what is used.

There is a danger of having public policy based on a belief system that is unsupported by fact. The majority once believed that the world was flat, that women should not vote, and that the colour of your skin dictated your place in society. Had people not questioned these perceptions, the luddites would be in charge of the world.

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Consider this: if unchecked, the municipal politicians will soon be dictating what you can and cannot buy at the supermarket.

Taking a little pride in our properties is a right of expression. Forcing the public to adopt a set of beliefs based on conjecture and hearsay is not right. We will defend our position on behalf of our industry and customers.

Letting the facts get in the way of a good story is a right of the media. The credibility issue depends on the facts.

Jeffrey Lowes,
M-REP Communications,
Kingston, Ontario

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Attack messenger, OK, but not scientific facts

February 6th, 2009

Kelowna Daily Courier: Letter to Editor

Pesticide Debate

Re: There's a good reason they're not believed, letters, Feb 3.

As the director of government and industrial relations, I also hold the title of principle investigator for MREP Communications. 8 of 18.

Because of the findings of experts in the field, I have reason to protest the proclamations of activists. My protests and explanations take place in committee and council chambers across the country. My company's mission is to ensure that proper science and not the court of public opinion governs good environmental stewardship and policy development.

I question the objectivity of the media and the writer and wonder why all sides of any issue are not subjected to the same scrutiny. Maybe the facts get in the way of a good story.

The lawn care industry has four pillars in their use of products to provide their goods and services. One: the product has to be registered with Health Canada . Two: the product has to work. Three: the product and methods have to be cost effective. Four: use should not increase their carbon footprint.

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I understand why the writer agrees with the information I presented – simple logic. However, the drive-by-smear of the writer – in order to create intangible links – is either spin by the activists or an underlining issue of phobia.

It is healthy to question what was stated. My presentation at the IEPMA Conference in Kelowna on January 29 was open to the public and I brought documentation to support all statements made. I cannot understand why the writer and the media fail to put the activists under the same microscope.

The doctor who appeared in the CHBC News clip about the event (the evening following my presentation) made boilerplate statements such as “there is a large overwhelming body of scientific evidence...” Although the public no doubt perceived the “doctor” as a medical experts, it should be noted that he holds a PhD in English, not medicine.

As to the “growing body of evidence,” those reports are currently the subject of a fraud investigation. In the Land of Oz, the activists don’t want you to pull 9 of 18. back the curtains: you will find smoke, mirrors and a lot of fertilizer.

You can attack the presenter – that is my job to be out front, and I have a thick skin. But I know I have done my job when the attacks are about me and not the information I presented.

There is a misconception – created by activists, politicians and the media – that the industry will be compliant and allow accusations and public statements to go unchallenged. The industry will provide the venue (a courtroom) for individuals and organizations to try to prove their beliefs.

Jeffrey Lowes
M-REP Communications

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Anti-pesticide bylaws unsound, advocate for products argues

February 5th, 2009

Kelowna Daily Courier

Dear Editor:

For over seventy years, the Canadian Cancer Society has been the nationally respected and trusted voice on all cancer issues. We fund the most research, 10 of 18. support the most people and fight to prevent all types of cancer.

Regarding the risk of developing cancer through exposure to pesticides, we agree that more research is needed. However, there is enough current scientific evidence to show that precautions should be taken. More and more studies link pesticide exposure to developing non-Hodgkin lymphoma, adult and childhood leukemia, brain, kidney, pancreatic, prostate, and some lung cancers. At higher risk are those who work with pesticides as part of their job.

We all have a right to know if we are being exposed to cancer-causing substances in our communities. The Canadian Cancer Society believes that it is better to be safe than sorry.

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Taking precaution can start with the simple action of eliminating the use of pesticides to beautify lawns and gardens. The cosmetic, or ornamental, use of pesticides has no health benefit but is shown to have the potential to harm our health and the environment. Why use toxic chemicals when safer alternatives exist?

Encouragingly, people in cities across BC, including Kelowna , are open to non-toxic practices. In a recent Ipsos Reid survey, more than eight in ten of those with a lawn or garden in Kelowna said they would be likely to try alternative practices instead of chemicals or pesticides if they were provided with information and tips on how to do so.

Even when applied properly according to manufacturer's instructions, pesticides can still pose risks. Pesticides sprayed on lawns can drift or runoff and mix with the air, soil or surrounding body of water. Pesticides can be absorbed through the skin; inhaled (breathed into the lungs); swallowed by eating residues on vegetables and fruit or through touching hands to the mouth.

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Typical childhood behaviours such as playing on lawns and putting objects in their mouths make children especially susceptible to pesticide exposure. Residue brought into the home by pets, or from shoes and clothing is also a concern.

This is why the Canadian Cancer Society is calling for a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides. We encourage you to join us in asking all levels of government to implement legislation to reduce or eliminate the cosmetic use of pesticides. By speaking up and taking action we can create environments that promote health and prevent cancer from starting in the first place.

Jerilynn Kiely, Community Action Coordinator
Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon , Interior Region

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Pesticide industry must stop denials

February 1st, 2009

Opinion. Editorial.

The Okanagan Sunday

The pesticide industry was fighting back in front of a sympathetic audience in the Okanagan last week, but it's still losing ground in the overall public relations battle.

Speakers at a conference of pesticide applicators criticized the ever-growing number of municipal bylaws limiting pesticide use, including one taking effect in Kelowna. 12 of 18.

In an interview, lobbyist Jeffrey Lowes declared bylaws limiting pesticide use are based more on faith than science.

"Properly used according to the labelling instructions, they are all safe," he said.

University of Guelph toxicologist Keith Solomon was to cite scientific studies at the conference that defend pesticide safety.

Kelowna's bylaw will bar homeowner use of pesticides on trees, lawns, shrubs and flowers.

Commercial and agricultural applicators will still be allowed to ply their trade. Fruit and vegetable gardens are also exempted from the bylaw – along with, hypocritically, city lands.

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The pro-pesticide folks don't yet understand why their side is losing. It's because they're suffering a credibility problem.

They may be right that pesticides can be used safely, but they don't seem to respect legitimate concerns raised about their industry.

Right now, some of them sound like the industry-funded lobbyists who used to deny that cigarette smoking was harmful.

The purpose of pesticides is to kill things – weed, bugs and whatever detracts from a perfect-looking garden or lawn.

Pesticides are poisons. It's as simple as that, and it is foolish to try to convince the people that poisons do no harm.

Much pesticide use is for cosmetic purposes only. That's not a good reason to put more harmful ingredients into our ecosystem.

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Some people need to get over the ideal of having the perfect lawn.

Lowes is surely correct when he says pesticides can be used safely if you follow the instructions. That's not an unreasonable message.

But the industry has to clear away the rest of its verbal garbage before people will heed the nuggets that make sense.

It's about credibility, and the industry will lose on that count as long as it continues to play the denying game.

Pat Bulmer

City Editor

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Pesticides are safe if used properly says scientist

January 31st, 2009

By Jennifer Smith

Kelowna Capital News

Anything can kill you, it's the dose that counts, according to Keith Solomon, a toxicologist with the University of Guelph who spoke at the Environmental Plant Management Associations' conference Friday about using pesticides.

On Thursday, during the conference, another speaker, a pesticide advocate, challenged the industry to sue those who disagree with using the products.

By Friday afternoon, the troops were rallying behind the cause with conference conveners encouraging industry professionals not to have a knee-jerk reaction to reports in media that speak out in favour of Kelowna's cosmetic pesticide ban—particularly if they quote the UBCO English professor (or his wife) who are leading the rally against their cause. 14 of 18.

For his part, Solomon encouraged his audience to use the products judiciously, as simply any other tool in its arsenal, and tried to provide some facts for the fight.

"It's very difficult for the public, for politicians, to differentiate between the potential for harm and risk," he said.

Pound enough sugar, salt or egg white into a body and eventually you will kill a person, he said. It's the same principle with the chemicals.

Provided people follow the safety guidelines and use the products sparingly, they offer far more benefits than potential for harm, he said.

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In Kenya, 70 per cent of the population is involved in food production, whereas only two per cent of North Americans are, said Solomon, noting that those who criticize these products tend to be the ones who benefited the most from their existence.

"In Africa, they're trying to get more pesticides," he said.

As someone who tests the products prior to them reaching the market he said it's generally the user, not the product, that causes problems.

In North America, pesticides are directly responsible for only hundreds of poisonings versus thousands in the developing world where those spraying the products tend not to have the same protective gear and safety standards available to them.

As for Canadian pesticide bans, like the one instituted in Ontario, Solomon encouraged his audience to question the fine print, as it were, pointing to some obvious flaws in the logic.

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In that case, some very toxic insecticides, like pyrethrins, are fully permitted if they are used for health or safety reasons—like killing a wasps' nest.

Solomon suggested the testing is thorough and so-called cancer epidemics, linked to the products are unrealistic when one considers that the statistics, don't reflect an increase in cancers in Canada at all—at least if age and the population increase are factored into the equation.

Pesticides offer a \$3 to \$4 return on the dollar investment for growers—not much if they are not used sparingly, he said.

"Sometimes you just need that exact socket wrench for that exact size nut and there's no other tool in the tool box that will do," he said.

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Sue anti-pesticide politicians: consultant

January 29th, 2009

Kelowna Capital News

By Judie Steeves

The pesticide application industry should sue municipalities, councillors and environmental activists who advocate for, and pass, bylaws restricting the use of pesticides—particularly when such actions are based on fraudulent information, says an Ontario pesticide proponent.

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"Sue council members who say the products you use are detrimental to the environment or public health," Jeffery Lowes told members of the Integrated and Environmental Plant Management Association meeting in Kelowna Thursday.

Kelowna council's new pesticide regulation bylaw is now in effect, but it isn't a full ban on the use of pesticides, only on the use of them for cosmetic purposes—except by trained applicators, noted John Vos, general manager for citizen's services.

Lowes, a consulting investigator who is leading the fight against pesticide bans in Ontario, told delegates there isn't anything concrete to support activists' claims that pesticides cause harm to the environment or public health.

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"2,4-D is probably the safest product you have access to," he told the landscapers and pesticide applicators.

Most of the bylaws won't stand up in court, he said. The turfgrass industry is planning to sue in Ontario, he added.

He also claimed there are no economic benefits to a ban on pesticide use, but Vos feels Kelowna's bylaw likely would be of benefit to trained applicators, because it prevents the untrained from applying them.

He said he doesn't think Kelowna's bylaw is in jeopardy.

Kelowna Coun. Robert Hobson agreed, noting council has the power to regulate pesticides. The new bylaw was the result of interest from the public, and it will be enforced by complaints from the public.

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The regional district had already made the decision not to use pesticides in its public parks, and council received letters from doctors and from Interior Health supporting the new restrictions.

Even the industry is trying to reduce the amount of pesticides that are applied, by using such alternatives as Integrated Pest Management or IPM principles, he noted. As a farmer, he said pesticides are one of the most expensive costs of growing, so orchardists are not hesitant to use such alternatives as the Sterile Insect Release program to reduce their use.

He said he voted in favour of it because of a desire to have less pesticide use in the community, and also because of a "concern about the way people apply them," he said.

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The industry hero Jeffery Lowes making his presentation to the Integrated and Environmental Plant Management Association in Kelowna.