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Société canadienne du cancer

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### Saskatoon health region praised for showing leadership in eliminating the use of herbicides

31 July 2009  
SASKATOON -

A group of provincial organizations is applauding the Saskatoon Health Region for eliminating the use of potentially harmful chemicals for weed control on its grounds. The health region has decided not to use herbicides at Royal University Hospital, Saskatoon City Hospital, St. Paul's Hospital and Parkridge Centre in order to prevent unnecessary chemical exposure to employees, patients and visitors.

The Canadian Cancer Society, Saskatchewan Environmental Society, Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association, Lung Association of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Network for Alternatives to Pesticides commend them for taking action and recognize it as a positive step toward protecting the health of employees, visitors and the public.

"The Saskatoon Health Region is setting a great example by keeping the hospital environment free of unnecessary chemical substances" says Susan Lutkin of the Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES). "This is especially significant when considering that people trust hospitals to be principle care locations for people with sensitive immune systems and other health concerns."

"This commitment is a step to improve air quality and reduce new illness or the worsening of current health problems. We encourage safer and healthier alternatives for lawn and garden maintenance, says Paul Van Loon from the Lung association of Saskatchewan.

"There are safer ways to making your lawns look great, ones that are less harmful to kids, patients, visitors, pets and the environment." says Donna Ziegler, Director of Cancer Control for the Canadian Cancer Society. "We applaud the Saskatoon Health Region for being the first in Saskatchewan to take an active stand against the unnecessary use of pesticides," Ziegler added.

Last year an Ipsos Reid survey for the Canadian Cancer Society found that nearly 80% of Saskatchewan residents believe pesticides are harmful to human health, the environment, kids and pets. The SES found similar results among residents in six Saskatoon neighborhoods. "By stopping the use of cosmetic pesticides, the Saskatoon Health Region is reflecting the concern of the majority of Saskatoon resident's about the risks associated with unnecessary pesticide use," added Lutkin.

Jocelyn Orb is the sustainability coordinator for the Health Region and has been at the front line of the decision and is

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working with the grounds staff to make the change. "For now, we've simply stopped spraying herbicides and decided to accept the few weeds that have surfaced. In future growing seasons, this change will require managing our grounds differently. Much like health promotion, we're going to focus on enhancing the health of our lawns, shrubs and trees in order to prevent the development of weeds and noxious pests. If it becomes necessary, we will use non-toxic alternatives to herbicides, on a case by case basis," says Orb.

For its efforts, the Saskatoon Health Region will be presented with a Certificate of Leadership Towards Healthy Choices and Healthy Lifestyles.

**Background:**

The body of evidence on pesticides and cancer suggests a positive association between exposure to certain pesticides and some types of cancer. Based largely on occupational studies, the list of cancers includes non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukemia, brain cancer, kidney cancer, pancreatic cancer, prostate cancer, and lung cancer. There is also strong evidence that children may be more vulnerable than other population groups. In some cases, evidence linking pesticides and cancer will not be scientifically definitive, but it may be suggestive and growing. Pesticide use should only be considered as a last resort to manage pests that may affect our health, safety or food supply, and exposure should be reduced to the lowest possible level.

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The Canadian Cancer Society is a national community-based organization of volunteers whose mission is the eradication of cancer and the enhancement of the quality of life of people living with cancer. When you want to know more about cancer, visit our website [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca) or call our toll-free, bilingual Cancer Information Service at 1 888 939-3333.

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