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NEWS RELEASE

Thousands of Canadians poisoned by pesticides each year Report finds 821 Ontario children victims of acute pesticide poisoning annually

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OTTAWA – More than 6,000 Canadians, including nearly 1,650 Ontarians, are directly poisoned by pesticides each year and nearly half of those are children under the age of six, according to a new report by the David Suzuki Foundation.

“Protecting children's health is one of our most vital responsibilities,” says David Boyd, report author and environmental lawyer. “The startling number of Canadian children poisoned by pesticides provides compelling evidence that stronger actions are required to prevent these incidents from happening.”

The report *Northern Exposure: Acute Pesticide Poisonings in Canada* tallied data on pesticide poisonings gathered from provincial and regional authorities covering nine of the 10 provinces.

In Ontario alone, pesticides acutely poison an estimated 1,629 Ontario residents, including 821 children under the age of six, each year.

More than 125 municipalities in Canada have passed bylaws to restrict cosmetic pesticide use, including 22 Ontario towns and cities. Quebec is the only province with legislation that prohibits the sale of some pesticides approved by the federal government – although currently only 20 active ingredients are subject to the ban.

“Pesticide Free Ontario is seeking province-wide legislation, similar to Quebec's new *Pesticides Management Code*, to stop the sale and use of lawn and garden pesticides, thus protecting the health of all residents of Ontario and not just those with municipal bylaws,” says Susan Koswan of Pesticide Free Ontario. “Both acute and chronic low-level pesticide exposures pose an unacceptable and unnecessary risk to our health and environment, particularly because there are safe and effective alternatives.”

In addition to the shocking number of acute pesticide-related poisonings, the report concludes that Canada operates an ineffective system for tracking and monitoring acute poisonings, and most importantly, fails to sufficiently protect its citizens from the adverse health effects of pesticides. The David Suzuki Foundation endorses the creation of a national environmental health tracking system that includes pesticide poisonings, as well as a national poisoning prevention program.

“The mere presence of pesticides in a home, garage, or garden creates a risk to homeowners and children, as does the application of pesticides,” says Lisa Gue, the Foundation’s health and environment policy

analyst. “Governments should ban the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides on lawns and gardens to eliminate a probable source of many of these poisonings.”

Acute poisoning, in contrast to chronic, refers to health effects that are the immediate and direct result of pesticide exposure – through inhalation, eating, drinking, or direct contact with eyes or skin. In humans, pesticide poisonings can cause nausea and vomiting, and negatively affect the respiratory and nervous systems, among other symptoms and conditions.

The report also estimates that acute pesticide poisonings might cost the Canadian economy as much as \$16 million per year, not including any valuation of the pain and suffering endured by thousands of Canadians and their families, or the potential costs incurred as a result of damage to the normal development of children.

- 30 -

*The full report, **Northern Exposure: Acute Pesticide Poisonings in Canada**, can be found online at: http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Publications/Northern_exposure.asp. For more information, visit: <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/health/food/poisoning.asp>*

For more information contact:

Jason Curran
Communications Specialist, David Suzuki Foundation
Office: (604) 732-4228, ext. 229 Cell: (604) 961-9591

Susan Koswan
Steering Committee Member, Pesticide Free Ontario
(519) 578-8508

Backgrounder

Northern Exposure: Acute Pesticide Poisonings in Canada - Report Recommendations:

1. Require all pesticide products to be sold in child-resistant containers to minimize risk of accidental exposure.
2. Increase funding to poison control centres.
3. Implement a national poisoning prevention program.
4. Ban the sale and use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes (e.g. lawns and playgrounds).
5. Terminate the registration of all pesticide products where the active ingredient has been banned in another OECD country because of health or environmental concerns.
6. Establish a national environmental health tracking system that includes pesticide poisonings.
7. Recognize Canadians' right to live in a healthy environment.

Advice for Canadians: How to reduce the risks of pesticide poisonings:

1. Don't buy pesticides. Avoid using or storing pesticides in and around the home and garden. Non-toxic, less toxic, and yet equally effective alternatives are almost always available.
2. If you do use pesticides, carefully follow the instructions on the label. Wear proper protective clothing. Post a sign to warn others that the area has been treated. Avoid using pesticides when children are nearby.
3. Always store pesticides and other hazardous substances (e.g. medication, cleaning products, and cosmetics) in locked cabinets or other places that are inaccessible to children.
4. Keep pesticides in their original containers to prevent mis-identification.
5. Dispose of pesticides and other toxic household products currently in your possession in a safe manner. Provincial poison control centres, health care facilities, and local recycling and waste management facilities often offer useful information about safe disposal. Do not put in the garbage, pour down the drain, or flush down the toilet.
6. Keep a close eye on children when visiting friends or relatives, as they may not take the same level of precautions that you take at home.
7. Purchase local organic food whenever possible.
8. Talk to families, friends, neighbours, and colleagues about this report and the preventable health risks posed by pesticides. Find out about pesticide policies at your children's schools and day-care facilities.
9. Vote for politicians (federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal) who support tighter restrictions on the use of pesticides in Canada, such as the recommendations advanced by the David Suzuki Foundation.
10. Keep the number for your regional poison information centre near the phone.