

Thousands of Canadians poisoned by pesticides each year

Report finds 2,800 children victims of acute pesticide poisoning annually

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OTTAWA - More than 6,000 Canadians 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 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 an environmental health initiative in Canada that includes the tracking of 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."

More than 125 municipalities in Canada have passed bylaws to restrict cosmetic pesticide use. Quebec is the only province with legislation that prohibits the sale of some pesticides. At the present time however, only 20 active ingredients are subject to the ban.

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 best way to prevent these tragic pesticide poisonings is by banning toxic lawn chemicals," says Dr. Kapil Khatter, president of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. "That's why doctors strongly support legislation - at all levels of government - which phases out the use and sales of these products."

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.

*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>*

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