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Pesticide Free Ontario

Debunking Industry Opposition to a Province-wide Ban on Lawn and Garden Pesticides

The science points to serious health risks

If you've heard: "Pesticides are safe..."

You should know:

- ❗ **Pesticides are toxic.** The federal agency responsible for registering pesticides does not claim they are safe. Rather, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency makes a determination of "acceptable risk" and advises Canadians to minimize exposure.
- ❗ A systematic review of the epidemiological literature by the Ontario College of Family Physicians found "**consistent links to serious illnesses**, such as cancer, reproductive problems and neurological diseases" associated with pesticide exposure.¹ The findings of this landmark study have been published in *Canadian Family Physician* and *Canadian Journal of Public Health* – respected, peer-reviewed journals. Other independent research supports the OCFP findings, notably the 2002 review by Toronto Public Health.²
- ❗ **Children tend to be more highly exposed and more vulnerable** to pesticides than adults. Vulnerability is particularly high in the womb when organs and systems are developing. Certain pesticides are associated with childhood cancer, and with impacts on reproduction, fetal and child development, most notably with negative impacts on the developing brain.³

Targeted measures to address the cosmetic use of pesticides are appropriate

If you've heard: "Cosmetic pesticide use is no different than agricultural and forestry applications..."

You should know:

- ❗ The **negligible benefits** of cosmetic pesticide use cannot justify the public health risks associated with this usage – in rural and urban areas alike. In a world of multiple chemical threats, we must eliminate needless exposures.
- ❗ Lawns and gardens are **closer to where most people live** and where children play. Lawn and garden pesticides represent a potentially significant and often involuntary pathway of exposure.
- ❗ There are valid concerns around pesticide use in agriculture and forestry that should be addressed through separate measures.

Precaution justifies a province-wide ban

If you've heard: "Health Canada already regulates pesticides, and this is sufficient..."

You should know:

- ❗ All levels of government share responsibility for protecting health and the environment. As Quebec's National Public Health Institute stated, in support of reducing the use of lawn and garden pesticides,

“The data which are presently available, the fact that certain aspects remain poorly understood, and the increased vulnerability of certain groups provide **ample reason to justify taking a prudent approach and applying the precautionary principle** with respect to pesticide use.”⁴ 140 municipalities across Canada have passed bylaws to restrict the use of lawn and garden pesticides. In Quebec, provincial regulations to this effect have been in place since in 2003.

- ❗ Health Canada evaluates each pesticide one at a time in isolation from other pesticides and without accounting for the **multiple chemical exposures** that occur in our daily lives. There is overwhelming public support for eliminating needless exposure to chemicals like cosmetic pesticides.
- ❗ At least 50 pesticide active ingredients registered for use in Canada have been banned in other OECD countries. For example, the lawn herbicide 2,4-D is banned in Denmark and Norway and was voluntarily withdrawn from the market in Sweden due to health and environmental concerns.⁵

Safer alternatives are available

If you've heard: “Banning cosmetic pesticides will lead to infestations and unattractive green spaces...”

You should know:

- ❗ **Alternatives products and techniques are widely available** and in use in the dozens of Ontario municipalities that already prohibit cosmetic pesticides. Many lawncare companies offer natural services that would comply with the proposed provincial ban. Banning the use and sale of lawn and garden pesticides would promote further development of alternative products and services.
- ❗ Phased implementation of a province-wide ban would allow for **education and transition** away from chemical lawncare.
- ❗ **Exemptions to protect public health** would allow the limited purchase and use of pesticides in specific instances – for example, to control for stinging wasps or mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus.

About us

Our organizations represent citizens, health professionals, and workers concerned with public health, occupational safety, and the environment. We support a province-wide ban on the use and sale of lawn and garden pesticides.

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¹ M. Sanborn et al., *Pesticide Literature Review*, Ontario College of Family Physicians, 2003. Quoting April 23, 2003 press release. <http://www.ocfp.on.ca/English/OCFP/Communications/CurrentIssues/Pesticides/>

² Toronto Public Health, *Lawn and Garden Pesticides: A Review of Human Exposure & Health Effects Research*, 2002. http://www.toronto.ca/health/pesticides/health_effects.htm

³ Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment, *Child Health and the Environment – A Primer*, 2005. www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca

⁴ Institut national de santé publique du Québec, *Thoughts on Urban Pesticide Use*, 2001. <http://www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/206-ThoughtsOnUrbanUsePesticides.pdf>

⁵ David Suzuki Foundation, *The Food We Eat: An International Comparison of Pesticide Regulations*, 2006. http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Publications/Food_we_eat.asp