

Environmental groups sue government over use of pesticides linked to cancer

Staff Reporter

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Environmental groups are suing the Government of Canada for its alleged refusal to review the approval of harmful pesticides already banned for use in other countries.

Ecojustice lawyers, acting on behalf of Équiterre and the David Suzuki Foundation, have filed a lawsuit alleging that the Minister of Health and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) acted unlawfully when they declined to review the approval of pest-control products containing three pesticides: chlorthal-dimethyl, trifluralin and trichlorfon.

Although these pesticides are already banned in Europe because of concerns over their impact on the environment and human health, they continue to be approved for use in Canada.

“This case is about ensuring that the Government of Canada protects its citizens and the environment from harmful pesticides,” Ecojustice senior scientist Dr. Elaine MacDonald argued.

“Other countries have banned these pesticides because they are extremely toxic and degrade the environment, so why is Canada still allowing their use?”

The lawsuit also challenges the PMRA’s delay in responding to review requests, submitted in October 2012, for 26 other harmful pesticides, several of which are believed to cause cancer.

For instance, the PMRA has yet to respond to the groups’ review request for atrazine, which has been banned in Europe since 2004. Commonly used on corn crops, atrazine is one of the most frequently detected herbicides in Canadian surface water and groundwater. Exposure to atrazine has reportedly been linked to reduced fertility in humans.

Environmental groups allege the PMRA did not review the following pesticides:

- **Chlorthal-dimethyl** is a herbicide used to control weed and grass growth on farms and has been banned in Europe since 2009. Several U.S. states have reported groundwater contamination from use of chlorthal-dimethyl. It has also been detected in Canadian surface water. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has classified the herbicide as a possible human carcinogen.
- **Trifluralin** is a top-selling herbicide in the Prairie provinces and can be found in 17 registered pesticide products in Canada. It has been banned in Europe, since 2007, because of its high toxicity to fish, high persistence in soil and high potential for bioaccumulation.

- **Trichlorfon** is an insecticide approved for use on balsam fir and spruce wood lots, Christmas tree plantations and cattle. Banned in Europe since 2007, trichlorfon is linked to central nervous system and neurological effects in humans. It is also toxic to bees and birds.

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