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- [CBC.ca](#)
- [Newsnews drop down menu](#)
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- [Radioradio drop down menu](#)
- [TVtv drop down menu](#)
- [My Region drop down menu](#)
- [More drop down menu](#)
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Calgary committee votes to phase out pesticide use

Last Updated: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 | 7:35 PM MT [Comments20](#) [Recommend20](#)
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Laureen Rama wore a gas mask to the public meeting where she supported a ban on pesticides. (Rick Donkers/CBC)

More than 100 people packed into a city committee meeting Wednesday — some waiting up to eight hours — to debate restrictions on the use of pesticides in Calgary.

The standing policy committee on utilities and environment had asked for public input on whether or not the city should phase out the cosmetic use of pesticides on public land by 2009 and private property by 2010.

Laureen Rama, an organic landscaper, showed up at the meeting wearing a gas mask to drive home her support for a pesticide ban.

"I've asked my neighbours not to use pesticides and most don't. But if anyone does in the neighbourhood, I start feeling it," she said, explaining she suffers from several chemical sensitivities.

Dr. Meg Sears, a health researcher from Ottawa's Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, said pesticides are toxic to humans and can lead to long-term health problems.



Municipalities have the power to restrict the use of pesticides, but not their sale. (CBC)

"Restricting pesticide use right where children live and right where children play is the lowest hanging fruit. You can make the biggest impact on toxic exposures to children by reducing their exposure to pesticides," she said.

Dave Day, the city's director of environmental safety and management, recommended that tough restrictions be introduced on pesticides and harsh lawn chemicals.

"If you're applying pesticides uniformly across a lawn that has 17 dandelions, you've just put pesticide in 97 per cent of the places you don't need it. And these products are very sinister in that regard, and they need to be removed from the market," Day said.

"That remains from my perspective ... the number one action to take."

More than 140 municipalities in Canada have bylaws restricting the use of pesticides, but they do not have the power to enact laws on the sale of the chemicals.

'When they are used according to the label, they are completely safe.'

—Stan Audette, Croplife Canada

Quebec is the only province that prohibits the sale of certain pesticides.

Pesticides are stringently tested to ensure they're safe for the environment and users, said Stan Audette, who works for Dow AgroSciences Canada, speaking on behalf of Croplife Canada, which represents manufacturers and distributors of pest control products.

"When they are used according to the label, they are completely safe," he said.

After hearing eight hours of submissions, the committee voted Wednesday to move ahead with the phase-out. The motion will be debated at city council in July.

Businesses worry about impact of restrictions

Golf courses and landscaping professionals have asked to be exempt from any restrictions, saying they would put them out of business.

Landscapers predict it will take more time, more staff and therefore more cost to remove weeds by hand in a pesticide-free environment.

"Certain condos would pay for it, certain places wouldn't," said Kari Anderson from Hire-A-Husband Landscaping. "The city can't afford to pay people to pluck a dandelion out of the ground."



A city committee on environmental policy wants to phase out pesticide use by 2010. (CBC)

Meanwhile, golf courses say the cost of maintenance and labour would get passed on to their customers.

"Some of the smaller courses have described it as ... financially devastating," said Mitch Jacques of the Alberta Golf Industry Association. "I think you're going to see some of the smaller courses not being able to supply the product people expect so they're going to lose some of their regular green-fee customers."

But many homeowners and gardeners are choosing more environmentally conscious paths, so some stores aren't worried about a potential drop in pesticide sales.

"As soon as I get them in, they're gone," Home Depot staffer Rodney Hodgins said of the store's weed-picking tools. "So we know that it's not going to affect business very much."

Barbara Letkeman, who lives in the southeast community of Pennbrooke, said she uses natural fertilizers to choke out weeds, and also pulls some by hand.

"Our yard is just filled with birds, trees, and you can't use pesticides. It's going to kill the earthworms," she said. "You can't do that."

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[RubyBagonia](#) wrote:Posted 2008/06/26

at 3:53 PM ETI'm not sure why we don't begin looking at alternatives to grass that don't require pesticides. Clover, I heard, is one such alternative. Grass is a waste of many resources.

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[MikePritch](#) wrote:Posted 2008/06/26

at 2:33 PM ETI fully support banning cosmetic herbicides and pesticides! Having worked for a major lawncare company that sprayed this poison; I can confidently say that they do not use these chemicals correctly: I was told to apply the pesticide on rainy days when it just washes into the sewers (and therefore the river) without doing anything to the lawn. Many also spray weeds on driveways (again making it wash into the storm sewers) and too close to creeks/runoffs.

Lime manages PH, worms aerate, and never cutting more than a third of a blade of grass makes a lawn strong and saves water. A healthy lawn, fertilized organically, will easily resist weeds and pests.

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[3 Agree / Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)**CaliRo** wrote: Posted 2008/06/26

at 2:31 PM ET I'm all for not using pesticides and herbicides but in the city I don't think this will make much of a difference. Air pollution probably has a much larger impact on absorbing into veggies and fruit than pesticides do.

On another note, can I get more info on this weed puller Calgary girl? Right now I use a little hand tool that looks like a trowel but with a pointy fork at the end. It makes weed pulling a chore and the dandelions always come back.

- [1](#)
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[1 Agree 0 Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)**Pentothal** wrote: Posted 2008/06/26

at 1:59 PM ET Todd Ormann wrote:

"To make statements that the PMRA and other government organizations put people at risk is simply callous and careless. These are experts in their field that know the facts and are paid to protect our interests... When people make decisions based on such broad based fear mongering and ignore the experts we do society much harm. These products are safe, or they would not be on the market. Let's rely on facts supported by experts."

Experts? These experts are the same people who tell us that the toxic lakes brewing around Fort McMurray are safe, even as birds sink into the murk, and people and fish get cancers. When a Fort Chipewyan doctor voiced his concern, Health Canada silenced him.

These are the same people who despite scientific consensus and contrary to major health organizations promote the deadly export of chrysotile asbestos to the Third World, even though it is banned in Canada.

These are the same people who refuse to label genetically-modified (GMO) products, thus preventing consumers from making an educated choice about what they eat.

These are the same people who okayed the feeding of animal remnants to ruminants. Mad cow, anybody?

These are the same people who give the meat and dairy industries a say in writing the Canada Food Guide.

Anybody who thinks that Health Canada is unique among government departments and somehow immune to political and corporate pressure is delusional. No doubt Health Canada can recommend a "safe" anti-psychotic medication.

The Health Canada studies do not account for accumulation in the environment, bioaccumulation, or the possible reaction with other harmful chemicals. Saltpeter, charcoal, and sulphur do not have much effect on their own. Put them together and you get gunpowder.

Agent Orange--the defoliant sprayed by US forces in Vietnam contains 2,4-D and another, closely related chemical. Their legacy is a legion of birth defects. The chemical by-products of manufacturing 2,4-D are also highly toxic.

The best weed control is a healthy lawn--not turning your lawn into a Superfund site.

- [6](#)
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[6 Agree 0 Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)**Todd Ormann** wrote: Posted 2008/06/26

at 12:49 PM ET Shame!

Common sense get's derailed by fear mongering.

By their very nature, these products are some of the most stringently tested products on the market and have been proven safe. Take for example Glyphosate. Not just PMRA says it's safe so does the EPA and the World Health Organization (WHO). Their overwhelming consensus is that Glyphosate herbicide, when used according to label, pose no unreasonable risk to people, wildlife or the environment. This product is used in 130 countries around the world, it is the choice for most zoo's around the world, it is used to preserve the ruins of Pompeii, and it is also used restore natural habitats threatened by invasive weed species. In fact it is endorsed by the Darwin Research center in the Galapagos Islands, where it is used to protect the natural habitat of the giant sea turtle.

To make statements that the PMRA and other government organizations put people at risk is simply callous and careless. These are experts in their field that know the facts and are paid to protect our interests. Let's not let blanket statements of fear like "pesticides are bad" decide this argument. When people make decisions based on such broad based fear mongering and ignore the experts we do society much harm. These products are safe, or they would not be on the market. Let's rely on facts supported by experts.

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- Previous
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- [2](#)
- [3](#)
- [4](#)
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