

SCIENCE SHOULD DICTATE POLICIES ON URBAN PESTICIDE USE

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Important public policy decisions should be based on sound science. Unfortunately, in the case of urban pesticide use, some provinces across Canada have chosen to ignore scientific evidence demonstrating the safety of pest control products. The result has been that many homeowners no longer have access to safe and effective weed, insect and disease control tools.

Certain groups call for restrictions on the use of pesticides based on the precautionary principle, but what they fail to recognize is that the precautionary principle is the foundation for Canada's regulatory system. The primary objective of the Pest Control Products Act (PCPA) is "...to prevent unacceptable risks to people and the environment from the use of pest control products."

The PCPA is inherently precautionary with its required pre-market assessments and prevention of unacceptable risks. The PCPA also applies a precautionary approach by requir-

ing that all currently registered products undergo periodic re-evaluations to ensure they continue to meet modern scientific standards.

The reality is that pesticides are one of the most regulated products available in Canada. The exhaustive and comprehensive scientific review and safety assessment by Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) ensures the protection of human health and the environment.

Using the strictest health and safety standards anywhere in the world, Health Canada carefully reviews all scientific evidence



Dandelions in Ottawa, Canada



Grubs in Ottawa

and studies before a pesticide product may be approved for sale and use. PMRA employs more than 300 scientists who are dedicated to the evaluation of pesticides. They are experts in this field and only the products that meet Health Canada's strict health and safety standards are registered.

Recognizing the need to continue to lead in the protection of human health, the federal government updated and brought into force new pesticide legislation in 2006, providing Canadians with the strongest protection on a global scale.

Specifically, pesticides undergo more than 200 separate tests addressing a wide range of health and environmental issues. The PCPA requires special provisions for the protection of various groups, including children, pregnant women and the elderly.

Special reviews can also be triggered at any time if new scientific evidence calls into question the safety of a product. The legislation has very stringent transparency provisions and as such all the data as well as the analysis on pesticides are publicly available for review.

Virtually no other product has been subject to the same level of scientific scrutiny and regulatory oversight as pesticides. Even with such high standards in place, provinces and municipalities across Canada continue to undermine Health Canada's work by imposing arbitrary bans on these federally-approved products.

Take Quebec, for example. After nearly a decade of falsely claiming that products containing 2,4-D are dangerous and denying its residents the ability to use such products, the Quebec government took a major step in 2011 by conceding that *"products containing 2,4-D do not pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment."*

While this statement marks an important step forward in recognizing the safety of 2,4-D, the province continues to restrict access to these products for homeowners to protect their properties.

Some argue that the reason for the ban is that the products are unnecessary. If that were in fact the case, it is difficult to understand why every ban in the country contains a list of exempted products. If they were truly unnecessary, would not all pesticides be banned for those uses?

One need only look at Ontario to see the negative impacts of such a ban. Recent polling shows that just two years after the implementation of a ban, many homeowners are unhappy with it citing more weeds and insects in their lawns and gardens and a lack of available effective tools to control them.

And a simple observation of the public green spaces and parks in the province shows the state of disrepair brought on by the ban.

Pesticides help protect private and public properties from insect, weed and disease infestations and control threats to human health, like rats and mosquitoes. They also help ensure that Canadians have a safe and affordable supply of food.

The benefits of well-maintained urban green spaces should not be underestimated. These spaces help produce oxygen and capture carbon and urban pollution, among other things. In fact, one average-sized lawn produces enough oxygen for a family of four.

Clearly there is a need for these federally-approved tools.

Some groups who advocate for restrictions on so called 'cosmetic' pesticides point to 'natural' products as an alternative. However, Health Canada recognizes that 'natural' does not equal safe and, as a result, all pesticides – regardless of whether they are natural or synthetic – are subject to the regulatory process.

The facts remain: homeowners choose to use pesticides as part of their personal pest management tools. Health Canada, which employs the precautionary principle in the regulation of pesticides, has found these tools to be safe for use by individuals. The ability to use these tools should not be limited based on unscientific arguments. Decisions such as these should continue to be made on the basis of sound science, thorough research and comprehensive evaluation by the scientific professionals we all depend on to keep us safe.

Pierre Petelle is the vice-president of chemistry at CropLife Canada. Pierre is responsible for helping to secure legislation, regulation and policy that encourage science and industry innovation, forging alliances with stakeholder groups to advance common positions and continuing to ensure lifecycle stewardship of pesticides. His work in representing Canada's plant science industry also includes increasing the awareness, understanding and acceptance of the benefits, safety and sustainability of plant science innovations. Prior to joining CropLife Canada, Pierre held the position of Section Head of Policy at Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency where he worked with a broad group of stakeholders on a wide range of issues important to Canada's plant science industry. Pierre has also worked in the structural pest control industry and holds degrees in Biology and Agriculture.