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Good Bye Chlorpyrifos!!!!

by Art Drysdale

by **Art Drysdale**

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Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>

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Well all of a sudden, a common pesticide that's used by gardeners has become a major villain! In the U.S. Chlorpyrifos (also known as Dursban) is to be voluntarily withdrawn by its manufacturers, Dow AgroSciences, after discussions with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), who were responding to regulations in the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) passed by the U.S. Congress (unanimously) in 1996. The FQPA requires a systematic review of all pesticides to ensure they meet the tough new safety standards that, for the first time, must be protective of children, who are among the most vulnerable to adverse health effects from pesticide residues, according to the EPA.

Industry people here, say the same thing is likely to happen in Canada when our federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) responds. Health Minister Alan Rock, during Question Period in the House of Commons on Friday, had a fairly bland response that did not indicate any immediate action. Late in the day however, I understand he said that the Canadian manufacturers had reneged on an agreement with the PMRA and that he was cancelling the registration of Chlorpyrifos.

I was both amused and annoyed when I watched an interview with a young 'kid' from a major garden centre chain interviewed on national television (CTV) and he explained that there is no problem such a ban because 'there are many new organic and natural products that do the same thing as these chemicals.'

Oh yeah! Who says?

The facts are, that for white grub control there are a limited number of options that work: Diazinon is the only chemical available to the public for their own use; Merit is available through commercial applicators only; Sevin XLR is or will be available soon on a similar commercial-applicator-only basis; and Mach II from Rohm & Haas is yet to be registered. In addition Dow AgroSciences is in the process of pursuing a registration in Canada for Spinosad that apparently satisfies the FQPA/EPA, as well as the PMRA's wishes for an improved and effective insecticide for similar applications. This product is available in the U.S. now, but I'm not certain whether or not it is available to consumers, or just for farming applications, and possibly for commercial spray applicators.

To go back to my 'kid' at the garden centre chain featured on CTV news, he is absolutely WRONG when he says there are other natural ways of controlling insects such as white grubs. I'm sure he's referring to the nematodes being sold in various outlets, and which have been tested time after time by various major manufacturers/suppliers/distributors in the industry in the last five or six years. They may very well work in California or similar climates where they were developed, but they do not work here. Yes, they will work on pests such as iris borer here, where the nematodes may be applied to open soil. But, the nematodes are not able to get down through the thatch produced by our grasses. In California, and other southern climates, they do not grow our cool-season rhizomatous (thatch-producing) grasses; rather they grow clumping type grasses. These are not able to produce a thatch, and hence the nematodes are able to penetrate the soil between the clumps, just as they do here in iris beds.

These officious pronouncements such as that from the aforementioned 'kid are very annoying! That gets me back to the 'how do new (and seasoned) gardeners know which advice is right, and which is not' syndrome -one of my most often encountered questions-and one to which I have few answers! That's another story.

On the Chlorpyrifos story, it is interesting to note that more than 3,600 individual studies and reports have been conducted examining critical aspects of Chlorpyrifos products as they relate to health and safety. Taken together, these reports and studies affirm that currently labelled uses of Chlorpyrifos products, when used as directed, provide wide margins of safety for both adults and children. It is also significant that both the United Kingdom and the Australian regulatory bodies have had positive scientific reassessments of the safety of Chlorpyrifos and it is anticipated they will not mitigate or discontinue the use or sale of the products.

William O. Robertson, MD, director of the Washington State Poison Control Center in Seattle, on his hearing of the action being taken in the U.S. against Chlorpyrifos, made an interesting comment. He said, 'It would be unfortunate if publicity over the Dursban decision resulted in parents being afraid to use insecticides to get rid of insects, because the next problem they might face could be a serious allergic reaction from insect bites or heavy exposures to cockroach allergens. Even though you may not be able to purchase Dursban (Chlorpyrifos) for home uses, it will be perfectly fine to use the products you have on hand. If you have wasps, ants, fire ants, roaches or other insect pests you want to get rid of, I see no reason why you should not use a product that has been doing that effectively and safely for more than 30 years.'



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In its own press release this past Thursday, the U.S. EPA said, 'EPA advises consumers that short-term use of these products according to label instructions does not pose an imminent risk.' As regards the possible risk of eating food treated with Chlorpyrifos, the EPA, on the same day, had the following to say: 'Food treated prior to these restrictions still provides a considerable margin of safety to consumers. This action simply makes it stronger. The health benefits of a varied diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables outweigh the risk of pesticide residues anticipated on treated fruit. Parents should continue to feed their children a balanced and nutritious diet rich in fruits and vegetables.'

On the topic of drinking water, the EPA, also this past Thursday, said: 'Monitoring data confirm that Chlorpyrifos does not impact groundwater.' And further, 'There are no acute concerns for residues in drinking water.'

While this topic received a great deal of press coverage at the end of this week, I was appalled by the ignorance shown by those in the national media of both the U.S. and Canada. We had national anchors and reporters putting at least three incorrect pronunciations of Chlorpyrifos, even though Ms Carol Browner, the U.S. EPA administrator did pronounce it correctly in her remarks at the press conference on Thursday. Could they not at least have listened to what she said? And by the way, there's another interesting point here, especially if you like me are wondering, 'why now?'. Why an announcement now when this chemical has been used successfully for 35 years? I remember well when it was introduced in 1965 as a panacea to replace the far more enduring and long-lasting Chlordane, used up until that time.

I think I may have an answer to that. I note in the EPA's Carol Browner's brief statement at the press conference, her mention no less than four times of the 'Clinton-Gore Administration'. And, in the press release the same day, there are four more such mentions of the 'Clinton-Gore Administration! This seems a bit heavy to me! You don't suppose the Clinton-Gore Administration (which up until recently, a I recall was always called the 'Clinton Administration') is calculating that this is a good election issue? Could be!

And that brings up a parallel topic that has been moved to the back burner with this past Thursday's announcement in the U.S. Do you remember Charles Cachia, once a federal environment minister? He announced about three weeks ago the possible inclusion in the federal Liberal party's election platform of a proposed ban on the use of cosmetic chemicals such as 2,4-D for weed control in lawns. That hasn't gone too far on the back of the stove!

If you are interested in learning more about Chlorpyrifos, you can go to the web and punch up www.chlorpyrifos.com.

As I've been advising for at least the last five years, for grub control, the chemical of choice remains Diazinon.

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