



## **If You Are Going to Try to Take Me On Regarding Pesticides, Then Please Get Your Facts Straight**

*by Art Drysdale*

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My two-sentence comment in this column nearly nine years ago, came to light again as I was searching for something else. When I re-read it, IO decided to repeat it here and now! Here was the two-sentence comment: "By the way, I understand that while no regulatory agency in Canada has banned any of the three components in Killex (and the essentially similar Nu-Gro/Wilson Lawn Weedout) Mecoprop is being withdrawn by its basic producing company offshore. So, those of you who are still able to use it legally may wish to stock up while it is still available!" brought more than the usual number of comments!

For example, K. Jean Cottam from Ottawa who always identifies herself as a PhD in her correspondence, and from whom I have heard before (and will no doubt hear in the future) said the following: "Regarding Mr. Drysdale [Sic] article of July 9, 2006, I am puzzled as to what would be the point in stocking up on the old herbicide Mecoprop? It is being replaced with "a purer" version, supposedly less toxic. The old version should have been withdrawn immediately, but our Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) goes out of its way (and everyone's way) to please its industry sponsors, so the old product is available until 2009.

“And why would you want to stock up, as Mr. Drysdale suggests, on something that isn't sold as a single product, but mixed with 2,4-D and Dicamba to form PAR III?

“By the way, all Weed & Feed products have been banned in the entire Province of Quebec and the Scandinavian countries. No one can purchase them.

“After all, this product consists of two highly incompatible elements: the fertilizer to be sprayed over the entire lawn and the weed killer to be sprayed on existing weeds.

“The main herbicide, 2,4-D, happens to be ineffective against inexistent [Sic!!!] and “future” weeds [ditto]. In its present state the herbicide needlessly contaminates weed-free lawn areas, persisting in the soil for about two weeks, with first break down product more toxic than the original herbicide. The herbicide poisons both our immediate land and air until it fully breaks down in the soil (about two weeks). However, the airborne portion moves on--onto neighbours' lawns, water bodies, even the Arctic.”

The other “letter-bomb” e-mail came from Susan Koswan representing the Steering Committee of Pesticide Free Ontario. It was brief: “Mecoprop is being withdrawn by its basic producing company offshore. So, those of you who are still able to use it legally may wish to stock up while it is still available! This is irresponsible advice. The PMRA, whether you agree with them or not, have a legitimate reason for removing any pesticide products from the market - ie adverse health and/or environmental impacts.”

So now let us look at the facts, instead of hearsay, upon which these so-called experts love to rely!

Just who says the newer version of Mecoprop (known as Mecoprop-p) is “purer” than the older one, known in the trade as ‘racemic mecoprop? The difference between the two is that the newer version contains only active isomers of the chemical and no inactive ones. There will therefore be slightly less of the chemical needed for effective use on the hard-to-kill broadleaf weeds in our lawns, such as clover, creeping Charlie etc. The reason the registration of the older product is not being pursued (according to the PMRA) is “During the course of the re-evaluation, the PMRA identified significant data gaps for racemic mecoprop that would have to be addressed in order to bring the supporting database up to modern standards. Rather than generate the required data to support continuing registration, the

registrants of technical racemic mecoprop have decided to discontinue sales of the technical active ingredient."

What that all means is that the basic manufacturers decided the sales in Canada (as well as other countries) did not warrant the expense of updating the paperwork needed by PMRA for re-registration.

What facts allow Ms Cottam to say "PMRA goes out of its way (and everyone's way) to please its industry sponsors?"

I am well aware that Mecoprop is not sold as a single product, but my use and familiarity with the product does go back to when it was sold as a single product for the control of the likes of clover which is difficult to control with 2,4-D alone. And how did "Par III" get into the discussion? I made no mention of this basically golf-course-orientated product, which, by the way, is essentially similar to 'Killex' and 'Lawn WeedOut'.

To state, "By the way, all Weed & Feed products have been banned in the entire Province of Quebec and the Scandinavian countries. No one can purchase them." is simply NOT correct! Virtually all the products are available under certain circumstances for various purposes in Québec. For example, golf courses are allowed full use of them. And, while Sweden has restricted the use of 2,4-D since 2002, it is not banned totally in northern Europe.

Further, Ms Cottam conveniently left out the fact that the UK has not banned any lawn and garden pesticides and their expert scientists continue to support pesticide use. For more on this and the Brits' opinions of some of our controversies see my April 30/06 article at <http://www.icangarden.com/document.cfm?task=viewdetail&itemid=6242> .

Then there is the out-of-left-field (pardon my double-entendre use of 'left') comment, "After all, this product consists of two highly incompatible elements: the fertilizer to be sprayed over the entire lawn and the weed killer...." Excuse me, where did I make any mention of Mecoprop being mixed with a fertilizer? Although I could, since I was the first person in Canada to mix up physically a batch of good turf fertilizer (Shur-Gain Turf Special 10-6-4 with 75% of the N from urea-formaldehyde) with 2,4-D and test it on a heavily infested (with dandelions) lawn, back in 1961! When introduced about a year later they even used my suggested name "Feed and Weedaway".

I'll make no comment on 2,4-D's or Mecoprop's effect on "inexistent and future weeds" since I am not familiar with the word 'inexistent' or with the term "future weeds". Would the latter possibly known as 'seeds'? I'll leave that to Ms Cottam's PhD friends.

I must also question Ms Cottam's assumption (apparently) that these products "needlessly contaminate weed-free lawn areas. That would only occur if the homeowner or applicator applies the products to areas where there are no weeds and why would anyone want to waste money doing that?"

Finally, I must correct Ms Cottam on her comments: "first break down product more toxic than the original herbicide" and "The herbicide poisons both our immediate land and air until it fully breaks down in the soil ... . However, the airborne portion moves on--onto neighbours' lawns, water bodies, even the Arctic." Yes, one of the breakdown products, the chlorophenol, is more toxic than 2,4-D. Again though, let's look at the facts, according to Dr. Keith Solomon, chairman of the Canadian Centres of Toxicology. "The amounts formed are small and, as with all things, it is the dose that makes the poison. They do not present a risk to humans or the environment. The salts of 2,4-D as used in all home formulations are not volatile and hence there is no 'airborne portion'."

I should end by advising those *very few die-hards* who continually write on these topics that I have no intent of responding to their further missives as I am not paid one nickel by any of the industries involved with these chemicals (I did recently go out and buy a hose-end sprayer of weed killer!). They do not even advertise on my garden programmes.