

Documentary tells how Quebec town launched anti-pesticide movement

Last Updated: Tuesday, June 2, 2009 / 12:39 PM ET [Comments3](#)[Recommend26](#)
CBC News

The town of Hudson, Que., glimpsed itself on screen Monday night, depicted as "ground zero" in the battle against the use of lawn herbicides and pesticides.

That's how Paul Tukey, a U.S. television host and author, saw the town that was the first to ban use of these products in its jurisdiction.

"I knew as a journalist that there had to be a good back story," Tukey told CBC News.

"That somebody had to go out on a limb and take on these chemical companies, because the chemical companies, trust me, go to unbelievable lengths to ensure they have the right to sell these chemicals."

Tukey produced the documentary *Hudson: A Chemical Reaction* to tell that back story, which included fighting chemical companies all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The documentary film had its premiere Monday night in a special screening for environmental group Go Green Hudson and the people of Hudson, Que.

"What a great story, and it's all really based around one woman, Dr. June Irwin. She's still a practising dermatologist well into her 70s on the West island of Montreal," he said.

"June Irwin fundamentally changed the North American landscape forever just by daring to speak out," said Tukey.

"She went to every single town meeting in Hudson from June of 1985 to until they passed the ban. Literally every single month she would show up and she would read a document full of facts and full of anecdotes that came in the news. She would read this aloud and say why aren't we getting rid of these things? Why are we allowing these products to be on our properties?"

Grassroots revolution

The town of Hudson's triumph at the Supreme Court in 2001 was only the start of the story, Tukey said. His documentary, shot last year in Hudson and across Canada, chronicles how Hudson's decision kickstarted an environmental movement toward organic lawn care.

"When June got it passed in Hudson, other folks across Canada started to say, look at what Hudson has done, and that's really depicted in our movie," Tukey said.

Quebec banned the chemicals throughout the province and individual municipalities across Canada followed Hudson's lead.

Tukey worked with director Brett Plymale to create the film, talking to the people of Hudson and researching the history at the local newspaper.

But the story of Hudson had been close to his heart for some time, because he had worked in the lawn care industry in his home state of Maine.

"I started in the late 1980s, and by the late 1990s I was coming home in the evening with blurred vision and nosebleeds and nausea, and I was really quite a physical mess," he said. A doctor attributed his health problems to his work with lawn chemicals.

Tukey said he then became interested in organic gardening, an interest he indulged by talking to experts across the U.S. for his TV series, *People, Places & Plants*.

In 2007, he wrote *The Organic Lawn Care Manual*, which had a single page of background about the story of Hudson.

His documentary *Hudson: A Chemical Reaction*, produced by PFZMedia, has been entered to screen at the Toronto International Film Festival this September.

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ebeaubie wrote:Posted 2009/06/05

at 1:49 PM ETI'd love to see this documentary and show to folks here: how can I get hold of it?

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MartineS wrote:Posted 2009/06/04

at 10:08 PM ETEvery single town meeting from 1985 till they passed the ban (late 90's, I suppose...). Isn't it amazing how long we can go on stubbornly doing something that is so detrimental to our health, just out of pure pride? Don't we hate to admit that what we are doing is very wrong, very unhealthy, and that we must make a change in order to protect everyone's health?

This was a lesson. I remember when the ban was passed in Hudson. It gave me hope that one day, in Montréal, the same ban would be passed. We live in NDG, and our two neighbours (one on each side) had their lawn sprayed with pesticides regularly. Every time, no matter how nice and sunny the weather was, I would keep my two young children inside the house for for an entire day, ust because I did not want to let them breathe the poisoned air...

Thank you so very much, Dr. Irwin!

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Wordsmyth wrote:Posted 2009/06/03

at 8:45 AM ETCongratulations, Dr. Irwin and Hudson -- your story definitely deserves to be told!

I was working in Hudson the year the town won at the Supreme Court. It really was a triumph. Beautiful little lakeside town.

Next I think we should have a documentary on Percy Schmeiser's legal battle with agrichemical company Monsanto! How about it, Mr. Tukey?

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