



# Pesticide Free Ontario

## Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

### Pesticide 2,4-D dangerous, doctors say

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Toronto—The garden pesticide 2,4-D is dangerous to human health despite a recent regulatory announcement, says the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE).

The physicians' group -- representing hundreds of medical doctors across Canada - says a landmark report from the Ontario College of Family Physicians shows clear associations between pesticides such as 2,4-D and serious illnesses such as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"The Ontario College of Family Physicians undertook the most extensive pesticide literature review in Canadian history," said Gideon Forman, CAPE's executive director. "The College looked at 27 studies on non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Twenty-three of the studies showed associations between this cancer and pesticide exposure."

The College's review also found links between pesticide use and leukemia, birth defects, and fetal death.

"Approval by the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency is not proof of 2,4-D's safety," said Dr. Kapil Khatter, CAPE's president. "Leaded gasoline was once government-approved as well. No reasonable person would call leaded gasoline safe. Or take cigarettes. They're certainly approved for sale but used as directed they cause lung cancer."

Health concerns are moving increasing numbers of Canadians to call for pesticide prohibitions. Recent polling in a number of cities has shown strong support for a complete phase-out of non-essential pesticide use. In the City of Ottawa, for example, a survey of 525 residents conducted by Oracle Poll showed 83% support a pesticide phase-out in public parks. The margin of error is 4.3%, 19/20 times.

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## Why doctors support banning pesticides

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By: Dr. Robin Walker and Gideon Forman

As the weather turns warmer and Ottawans take out their rakes, lawn mowers and canvas gloves, they may want to seek gardening assistance from an unlikely source: their family doctor. This year physicians across the province are advising residents on how they should maintain their properties. The first thing the doctors are saying is avoid pesticides -- the poisons used to kill weeds and insects. Instead, they recommend the use of lawn-care methods and products that are non-toxic.

Why are doctors saying the use of pesticides on Ottawa's lawns and gardens should be phased out? The recommendation follows the release in April, 2004, of a ground-breaking review of pesticide studies by the Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP), an association representing more than 6,700 family doctors. The OCFP's systematic review -- the most comprehensive in Canadian history -- found consistent links between pesticide use and serious illnesses such as cancer, reproductive problems and neurological diseases.

Among the review's findings:

- Associations between pesticide exposure and brain cancer, prostate cancer and kidney cancer;
- Associations between pesticide exposure and birth defects, fetal death and intra-uterine growth retardation;
- Increased risk of leukemia (a form of cancer) if children are exposed to insecticides and herbicides used on lawns and gardens.

In short, doctors are saying that, even when used as directed, pesticides could be extremely harmful to children and to adults. In fact, they're so potentially harmful that leading health organizations -- including the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment -- are urging Canadian cities to pass bylaws prohibiting cosmetic or non-essential pesticide use.

These health authorities recognize that citizens have a right to maintain their properties. But they're urging them to do so without poisons. Fortunately, that's not very difficult.

Homeowners can control insect pests by using nematodes -- naturally occurring microscopic worms that effectively kill grubs and larvae but are harmless to people and the environment. They can control weeds by aerating their soil, applying natural compost, recycling grass clippings, keeping grass long (at least three inches), and overseeding. (Overseeding crowds out unwanted species.)

A phasing out of pesticides isn't supported only by the medical community. It's also backed by the people of Ottawa. Polling earlier this year by the national firm Oracle Poll Research found that more than eight out of 10 city residents (82.5 per cent) support a pesticide phase-out in Ottawa's parks, while more than three out of four (75.6 per cent) support a phase-out on private residential properties.

Why the support for prohibiting these chemicals? Because Ottawans see them as threatening some of the most important things in their lives. Nearly eight out of 10 (77 per cent) said pesticides pose a threat to the environment, including wildlife, air quality and ground water. Nearly three out

of four (73.9 per cent) said pesticides pose a health threat to children.

In fact, local residents are so concerned about these chemicals they don't feel it's enough to simply teach people about their dangers. They also want city council to pass a bylaw prohibiting their use. Asked whether they favour a bylaw coupled with public education or education on its own, seven out of 10 (70.7 per cent) chose the combined bylaw-education package.

If poisonous lawn products are unsafe and unpopular -- and effective non-toxic ones are now easy to obtain -- surely it's time for Ottawa to pass a pesticide bylaw. This common-sense legislation would prohibit the cosmetic use of pesticides while still allowing homeowners to destroy harmful pests such as rats, mice, termites and poison ivy.

Across Canada, pesticide bylaws have been passed by some 70 communities, including Montreal, Toronto and Halifax. Isn't it time Ottawa council listened to local residents, doctors, nurses and hospitals -- and followed suit?

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