



## For the sake of the environment, Edmonton needs pesticide bylaw

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BY THE EDMONTON JOURNAL    APRIL 9, 2006

When the spring weather turns warmer and Edmonton residents 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 Canada are giving advice on how residents should maintain their property, and the first thing they're saying is avoid pesticides --- the poisons used to kill weeds and insects -- and instead use lawn care methods and products that are non-toxic.

Why do doctors support the phase-out of non-essential pesticides?

One reason is the release in April 2004 of a ground-breaking scientific study by the Ontario College of Family Physicians, an association representing over 7,000 family doctors. The OCFP's research -- the most comprehensive in Canadian history -- showed consistent links between pesticide use and serious illnesses such as cancer, reproductive problems, and neurological diseases.

Among the college's findings:

- Associations between pesticide exposure and brain cancer, prostate cancer, and kidney cancer.
- Associations between pesticide exposure and birth defects, fetal death, and underweight babies.
- Pesticides are implicated as a cause of tumours in children.
- Increased risk of leukemia (a form of cancer) if children are exposed to insecticides and herbicides used on lawns and gardens.

Doctors are saying that, even when used as directed, pesticides can be extremely harmful, both to adults and children. In fact, the threat they pose is so significant that leading health organizations -- including the Canadian Cancer Society (Alberta/NWT Division), the Capital Region Medical Staff Association, and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario -- all support bylaws which prohibit non-essential pesticide use.

These health authorities recognize that citizens have a right to maintain their property. But they're

urging them to do so without poisons.

Fortunately, that's not very difficult.

Homeowners can control weeds by aerating their soil, applying natural compost, recycling grass clippings, keeping grass long (at least seven centimetres), and regularly spreading new grass seeds. This over-seeding crowds out unwanted species.

But a pesticide phase-out isn't supported only by the medical community. It's also backed by the people of Edmonton.

Recent polling by the national firm Oracle Poll Research found three out of four residents support a pesticide phase-out on private residential property and nearly four out of five support a phase-out in public parks.

Why the support for prohibiting these chemicals? Because residents see them as threatening some of the most important things in their lives.

More than seven out of ten told the pollster that pesticides pose a threat to the environment, including wildlife, air quality, and ground water. Nearly two out of three said pesticides pose a health threat to children.

If toxic lawn products are unsafe and unpopular -- and effective non-toxic ones are now easy to obtain -- surely it's time for Edmonton 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 mice, wasps, and hornets.

Across Canada, pesticide bylaws have been passed by some 70 communities, including Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.

Isn't it time Edmonton city council listened to local residents, doctors, nurses, and hospitals and followed suit?

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