

## How did we become such fans of bans?

*The ban on cans is lifted in P.E.I. But elsewhere in the nation...*

PETER SHAWN TAYLOR | May 14, 2008 |

After more than two decades, Prince Edward Island finally lifted a ban on selling pop in cans on May 3. While the prospect of buying a cold drink in a can is an innovation for Islanders, the move had national significance as well. It was a rare example of a government permitting rather than forbidding something.

Ban-happy Canadian politicians have been busy lately. In April, Ottawa announced a ban on clear plastic baby bottles containing bisphenol A, Ontario banned all residential chemical pesticides, and Turner Valley, Alta., banned Styrofoam. These bans were all justified on the basis of science, but fail to live up to scientific standards.

When Federal Health Minister Tony Clement announced his baby bottle ban, he admitted that: "our science tells us exposure levels [to bisphenol A] to newborns and infants are below the levels that cause effects." And the pesticides banned by Ontario have been extensively tested and cleared by the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Keith Solomon, director of the Centre for Toxicology at the University of Guelph has grown increasingly cynical about the politics of bans. "This is random activity by governments keen to make political hay out of claiming to protect the public," he says. "To ban things on the basis of a health risk when the data doesn't support it is not being honest."

Solomon notes politicians rarely consider the risks of alternatives. Styrofoam is more benign than the paper products replacing it. And the ban on bisphenol A will lead to greater use of glass, metal and opaque plastic bottles. Aluminum has been associated with Alzheimer's, the nickel in stainless steel is a carcinogen, and opaque plastic harbours unseen bacteria. "This presents a far greater risk than bisphenol A," he says. "And glass breaks when you drop it."

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