

Manitoba plan to revamp pesticide law brings praise from lawn-care company, fear from Eco-Network

Sustainable development minister says most respondents in public consultation unhappy with restrictions

By Bryce Hoyer, [CBC News](#) Posted: Apr 19, 2017 9:28 AM CT Last Updated: Apr 19, 2017 3:11 PM CT

The Pallister government plans to have new "responsible and practical" regulations replace Manitoba's cosmetic pesticide ban by the end of the year.

The province called for feedback from the public last summer during a [review of the ban](#), which was passed less than three years ago to restrict the use and sale of certain synthetic lawn-care chemicals in Manitoba.

The majority of respondents "expressed dissatisfaction with the current regulations and urged a responsible and practical approach to restricting cosmetic pesticides," Manitoba Sustainable Development Minister Cathy Cox said on Wednesday.

"Based on this feedback, we will develop a framework based in practicality that provides clarification for both application restrictions and retail distribution," Cox said in a statement.

The new framework is expected to be completed by the end of the year. A provincial spokesperson refused to provide any details about the revamp.

'We're worried'

"We're worried about this because of people's sensitivities to chemicals, and ecosystems and people's health, of course," said Manitoba Eco-Network executive director Karen Peters.

Peters said she doesn't know what kind of changes the government has in mind, but she hopes the ban stays in place.

'It's just not doable to maintain that same level of service for the same costs.' - Chris Goertzen, president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities

"It didn't seem like there was an impetus to change it," said Peters, who sits on the committee Cosmetic Pesticide Ban Manitoba.

A Probe Research poll commissioned by the CPBM last fall suggests 53 per cent of 1,000 respondents were in favour of the current cosmetic pesticide ban, while 42 per cent were opposed. The remainder were unsure.

Results from a random sample size of 1,000 would yield a margin of error of +/- 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

'It's good news'

Tim Muys at Green Blade Lawn Care suspects the changes will permit companies like his to once again use chemicals currently restricted under the ban. But he also believes there will still be restrictions on

homeowners.

'I don't know if it will come back to store shelves.' - *Tim Muys, Green Blade Lawn Care*

"They didn't say, 'We're just going to abolish it and, you know, wipe it out,' so I think there is still going to be some sort of restriction as far as the use of pesticides again," Muys said.

Many big-box stores are going the green route and likely won't return to selling chemical pesticides, he said.

"I think it's good news and I think as long as professionals are permitted to do it, I think it's going to still provide a lot of homeowners with an economical option," he said. "I don't know if it will come back to store shelves."

Criticism for ban

The ban has been been [a source of debate](#) since before it was pushed through.

- [Environmental group regrets Manitoba's review of pesticide ban](#)
- [Manitoba pesticide ban needs provincial review, municipalities say](#)
- [Cosmetic pesticide ban means dandelions more expensive to fight](#)

Premier Brian Pallister criticized the ban in 2013, when the previous NDP government first announced plans to join more than [half a dozen other provinces](#) and stop use of synthetic pesticides.

Former conservation minister Gord Mackintosh formally introduced the legislation in 2014, citing [public health concerns](#) associated with pesticides.

The ban took effect in 2015, limiting the commercial sale and use of cosmetic lawn-care products, but an exemption remains in place for use in killing poison ivy or invasive species, or for agriculture and sports field maintenance.

'Unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk'

Despite the ban, a [CBC News investigation](#) discovered several retailers continued to sell Roundup to the public for uses that violated the ban.

Roundup and other common household herbicides contain glyphosate. The International Agency for Research on Cancer, a branch of the World Health Organization, labelled glyphosate as ["probably carcinogenic" in 2015](#).

In a report released last spring, the WHO said while there is "some evidence" to support a positive correlation between exposure to glyphosate among people who work with the substance and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

But the same report found the preponderance of evidence at this point in time suggests "glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet."

Health Canada's current stance is that glyphosate is safe to use.

Alternatives 'incredibly costly'

The Manitoba Eco-Network has run an organic lawn-care education program for more than 15 years, and Peters said they've shown it doesn't cost more to maintain green spaces with bio-pesticides and other organic alternatives.

Chris Goertzen, president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, said that isn't the case.

Municipal coffers have been hit hard by the ban, he says, because the regulation didn't come with any additional funding to compensate communities for the increased cost of keeping green spaces weed-free.

Alternatives to traditional pesticides aren't as effective and are "incredibly costly," costing 10 to 15 times more, Goertzen said.

Steinbach used to pay \$15,000 annually to keep its green spaces relatively weed-free, but after the ban was enforced the community saw that figure rise to about \$237,000 per year, a spokesperson for the municipalities association said in an email.

Winnipeg saw a significant if not slightly less severe jump, from about \$66,000 per year in pre-ban years to about \$593,000 after, the spokesperson added.

"It's just not doable to maintain that same level of service for the same costs," Goertzen said.

He said he hopes if the province plans to keep parts of the ban in place that it also starts compensating municipalities for associated costs.

He also hopes changes to the ban allow licensed applicators to use synthetic pesticides — a concession the Association of Manitoba Municipalities raised during Greg Selinger's time as premier that was not granted.

With files from Janice Grant and Meaghan Ketcheson

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