

# Lawn company may be charged in kids' spraying

By DANIEL MACELUCH  
and KAREN JANIGAN  
of The Gazette

The federal Agriculture Department will investigate an incident this week in which five of 21 Pierrefonds elementary school students who were sprayed with toxic pesticide developed rashes or eye irritations.

The lawn-spray company involved, ChemLawn Inc., could be prosecuted if it is determined that its employee was negligent.

Florent Ostiguy, an official at Agriculture Department's Montreal office, said in an interview yesterday he has asked his investigators to look into the matter as soon as possible.

"We have to verify what went on, but it's not the first time we've had an investigation of this kind," Ostiguy said. "We've already had contact with several of the (lawn-spraying) companies, telling them to improve their methods of operation and reminding them to follow regulations and procedures on the labels."

Ostiguy said the investigation will attempt to determine whether ChemLawn violated the federal Pest Control Act, which states that pesticides must be applied safely and according to directions.

Chris Ranger, information officer with the department's Pesticide Directorate in Ottawa, said in a telephone interview that the pesticide Orthene, which wafted into the playground at Beechwood school Monday from a neighbor's yard, should not be used when drift is possible.

## Could be prosecuted

Ranger quoted directions on the label of the pesticide, which say: "do not spray when drift is likely to occur . . . in areas where bystanders are likely to be directly exposed."

Declared Ranger: "If the company applied it in an unsafe manner, it could be prosecuted."

However, a ChemLawn official who visited Montreal immediately after the incident to meet with teachers and parents, said yesterday his employee was following company guidelines on spraying in windy conditions.

Bob Fisher, vice-president of North America's largest lawn-spray-

ing firm, said employees are told not to spray trees and shrubs if winds exceed 20 kilometres an hour; or grass if winds exceed 25 km/h.

On Monday, winds were blowing from the northwest at just under 20 km/h, an Environment Canada official confirmed yesterday, although he was unable to be more precise.

A scientist with the Ontario Environment Ministry said yesterday the incident probably never would have occurred in his province because of its strict guidelines on pesticide use.

## U.S. has rules

And in most American states, spraying in winds of more than 16 km/h is forbidden.

Industrial and commercial spraying in winds of more than 11 km/h is forbidden in Ontario, Joe Lucas said in an interview.

Ontario has had regulations on the use of pesticides since 1973, Lucas said, while the Quebec government is expected to introduce its own set of rules next spring.

The 21 Beechwood students were playing soccer shortly before noon on Monday when a cloud of pesticide blew across the playground. A ChemLawn employee was spraying trees in a nearby yard.

Several students said later they noticed a strange odor and spotted a nozzle poking through some shrubs. They said they tried to get the sprayer's attention, because he appeared to be unaware of their presence.

One student said the spray was "like a mist and tasted like bug repellent."

The incident has added fresh fuel to the growing controversy over the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers by lawn-spraying companies in residential areas. Several West Island doctors and homeowners are demanding an immediate ban on lawn-spraying.

One Pointe Claire dermatologist said she has treated more than a dozen cases of suspected pesticide poisoning of children in the past two months. Patients have displayed

(See LAWN, Page G-4)

• Bug spray no danger for children, company says. Page G-10