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Quebec backs down on 2,4-D, says it is not harmful to humans



TERENCE CORCORAN | May 26, 2011 | Last Updated: May 26 3:10 PM ET
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Dow scores NAFTA challenge victory over famous herbicide. What about BPA?

The details have yet to emerge, but Dow AgroSciences says it has [settled](#) a NAFTA challenge case with Ottawa over the pesticide 2,4-D. As part of agreement, a victory for the company, the government of Quebec has agreed to a statement saying the pesticides used chemical does “not pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment.”

Quebec was the first province to declare weed-killers containing 2,4-D as possibly carcinogenic. On that basis, municipalities in Quebec instituted bans of its use as a lawn weed killer. Other jurisdictions also banned 2,4-D, but often stopped short of declaring the chemical a carcinogen. Instead, they invented other reasons for eliminating the chemical, but the junk science cancer scare always lurked in the background as a motivation.

Laws against lawn herbicides containing 2,4-D therefore remain in place, but not because they pose any real health and environmental risk. Under the NAFTA agreement with Dow, “the government of Quebec agrees that products containing 2,4-D do not pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment, provided that the instructions on their label are followed.” This is consistent with Health Canada’s Pest Management Regulatory agency and regulators in the U.S. and Europe.

What this means in Canada is that we now have chemical bans in existence in all regions that are based on junk science scares perpetrated by environmental activists. Quebec set a precedent on the basis of a cancer scare, other regions followed.

Meanwhile, Canadian farmers—where almost 99% of 2,4-D is used—can continue to spray and know that there is now little chance that any ban will ever be extended to their industry. Within Canadian cities, however, dandelions and weeds cannot be removed using perfectly safe chemicals.

Which brings up Bisphenol-A (BPA), another chemical that’s safe by any measure and in most countries (Europe, US) but which is on Ottawa’s junk science list and helped turn Tory Cabinet Minister John Baird into local hero for mounting a baby bottle BPA ban. How many safe chemicals can governments ban on the basis of junk science claims by activists such as Rick Smith at Environmental Defense, aka more recently as the Lipstick Man.

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