

Quebec should toughen pesticide regulations, doctors urge

BY MONIQUE BEAUDIN, GAZETTE ENVIRONMENT REPORTER FEBRUARY 5, 2013 5:28 PM

Two doctors' groups are calling on Quebec to eliminate the use of pesticides for cosmetic or esthetic purposes, saying they pose too much of a risk to children.

The call from the Quebec College of Family Physicians, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and the environmental group Équiterre Tuesday comes as Quebec is reviewing the province's pesticide-management code.

Last year, Ontario's association of family doctors urged people to reduce their exposure to pesticides "whenever possible" in the wake of a review of 142 studies that showed links between certain pesticides and neurodevelopmental, respiratory and reproductive problems in children.

One of the authors of that study, Dr. Margaret Sanborn, was in Montreal Tuesday discussing her findings with doctors and scientists here. It was the second review of literature about the effects of pesticides on human health undertaken by the Ontario family doctors' group.

The highest risks were to fetuses exposed to pesticides during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and to children exposed during the first year of life, Sanborn said.

Among other things, the study, published in 2012, found:

An association between pesticide exposure, especially during pregnancy, and asthma. In adults, occupational exposure to pesticides was associated with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Problems such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and reduced overall IQ were more common in older children who had higher levels of pesticide exposure during their mother's pregnancy.

In utero exposure to pesticides was associated with lower birth weights.

Quebec is currently reviewing its pesticide-management code to toughen the rules on their use in urban areas, said Sophie Roy of Quebec's environment department. She said the government has met with various groups, including those representing the ornamental horticulture industry, environment groups and the health and agriculture ministries. The government hopes to have the new code in place by the end of the year, Roy said.

First adopted in 2003, Quebec's regulation bans 20 ingredients classified as carcinogens for use as lawn pesticides and restricts the use of pesticides in and around schools and daycares. It was the toughest pesticide regulation in North America when it was adopted.

In 2011, the David Suzuki Foundation and Équiterre compared pesticide regulations in six Canadian provinces and concluded Quebec was lagging behind such provinces as Ontario and Nova Scotia because it had not updated its regulation since its adoption in 2003. Some ingredients banned in Ontario, for example, are permitted in Quebec, Équiterre said.

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