



DR JUNE IRWIN 1933-2017: PIONEER IN THE FIGHT AGAINST PESTICIDES

Posted 01 Aug 2017



A text by Ann Petersen-Anderson, Edith Smeesters and Merryl Hammond*. While Québec is currently proposing to modify and improve the Québec Pesticide Code, a pioneer in the battle against pesticides has died, Dr June Irwin.

WHO WAS DR JUNE IRWIN?

Dr June Irwin died at the age of 83 on June 22, 2017. She has left an enduring legacy of local environmental activism which impacted a generation and led to both national and international awareness campaigns and legislation against pesticide use in urban areas.

In the 1980s, Dr June Irwin, who had a dermatology practice in Pointe Claire, Quebec, started to see patients with worrying health problems. True to her scientific training, she began taking blood samples from these patients and sending them to specialized labs in the US for analysis (which she paid for and continued to do throughout her practice), keeping records and documenting her findings. Dr Irwin soon made the connection between her patients' symptoms and their exposure to lawn care pesticides, which were then in widespread use.

Dr Irwin's warnings about the toxic effects of pesticides were ignored by the medical profession and the government. She stated: "*When it comes to pesticide use in Canada we are a human experiment. And no records are being kept.*" In 1985, based on her findings, Dr Irwin started a letter writing campaign to newspapers, municipalities and government urging them to ban pesticides. She regularly attended Hudson Town Council meetings urging the town to ban lawn pesticides.



JUNE IRWIN INSPIRED MANY PEOPLE AROUND HER

Dr Irwin inspired many others to join the campaign. In particular, she urged the medical community to be involved in environmental issues, which was later taken up by the **Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment**. Citizens who were concerned about the extensive use of pesticides in urban areas began to organize local meetings. Esther Goldenberg in Westmount launched the Pesticide Task Force, with support

from toxicologists and other scientists, to raise awareness about the impact of pesticides on animals and children. A group of women on the West Island initiated **The Raging Grannies** who went to public events with banners and songs denouncing pesticide use. In Baie-D'Urfé, Merryll Hammond set up a national umbrella group, **Citizens for Alternatives to Pesticides (CAP)**, and in 1986, biologist Edith Smeesters founded **Nature-Action** with a group of citizens in St-Bruno-de-Montarville. Mike Christie, a journalist from Ottawa, did extensive research on the pesticide issue keeping the movement informed and up to date.

At the start of the 1990s, Jean-Dominique Levesque-René, a nine-year old boy who had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, made headlines when he petitioned Ile Bizard municipal council to ban pesticides in his district. Encouraged by Dr Irwin, Jean-Dominic pursued environmental activism for which he received numerous awards.



Raging Grannies in front of Parliament.

FIRST BY-LAW; LAWSUITS; MOVEMENT GROWS IN STRENGTH

In 1991, Dr Irwin's hard work was rewarded when, with Michael Elliott as mayor, Hudson adopted by-law 270 banning all non-essential pesticides from residential and public spaces. Hudson was the first but was swiftly followed by many municipalities pressured by concerned citizens.

In 1993, ChemLawn and Spraytech Lawncare, two lawn care companies, sued Hudson in court, challenging the by-law in an attempt to offset the

wave of regulations. Hudson won twice and it was then taken to the Supreme Court.

The **Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund** (now called Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund) then hired lawyers Jerry DeMarco and Stewart Elgie to defend the cause as it would impact the future of public health and the environment at the national level. The Canadian Federation of Municipalities, World Wildlife Fund Canada and Nature-Action Quebec became intervening parties on Hudson's behalf working with Elgie to build a case.

By this time, the issue of pesticide use in urban areas had garnered a lot of attention which Edith Smeesters judged the right moment to create a bilingual provincial organization to unite the movement and push for provincial regulation. In 1999, she created the **Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (CAP)** borrowing the bilingual acronym with Merryl Hammond's permission to unite all sensitizing groups working around the issue. CAP gathered and translated a prodigious amount of scientific and medical documentation (including Mike Christie and June Irwin's), advocated alternatives to pesticide use in urban areas, organized a province-wide campaign to raise awareness and participate in round table consultations with health professionals, the ministry of the environment and representatives of the horticultural profession. André Boisclair, then Quebec Minister of Environment in Québec, took matters in hand but waited for the Supreme Court ruling before acting.



VICTORY AT THE SUPREME COURT!

In June 2001, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously to uphold Hudson's by-law! Lawyer Stewart Elgie successfully argued using the "*Precautionary Principle*" which became a landmark ruling based on the principle of protecting human health and the environment in the face of scientific uncertainty. The ruling gave the go-ahead to other towns and municipalities to follow suit and thereby redefined the politics of the environmental movement, empowering local initiatives. "*The Mouse that Roared*" was how one article described the impact of Hudson's historic achievement.

Dr Irwin stated: "*Lawn pesticides are an example of people willfully, though maybe not knowingly, poisoning their neighbors. These are terribly toxic substances and yet, it seemed to me, there was a conspiracy of silence. I'm pleased that, to some degree, we have been able to break through that silence to get the word out.*"



THE QUEBEC PESTICIDE MANAGEMENT CODE: A FIRST IN NORTH AMERICA

In April 2003, the Quebec provincial government created the Pesticide Management Code which banned the use of 20 active ingredients on public land. The ban was then extended to private properties in 2006 and included the sale of these substances.

In 2009, with the support of **Equiterre** and the **David Suzuki Foundation**, Ontario passed much more comprehensive legislation prohibiting the use and sale of 90 pesticides on public and private land. Currently over 200 municipalities have by-laws against cosmetic pesticide use in Canada and all but two provinces have legislation.

IMPACT ON THE USA

In 2009, Paul Tukey, an American from Maine who switched his lawn care business to organic practices due to serious health issues, held the World première of his film *A Chemical Reaction* in Hudson. It documents June Irwin's pioneering fight to get pesticides banned and relates the problems the US is experiencing due to the stronghold of pesticide companies that acted quickly to get state legislation passed prohibiting local by-laws.

"Tukey praised Irwin as an international environmental 'hero' for raising the issue of the impact on health of lawn chemicals." "This one woman really was the catalyst for this movement" he said..." there's no denying she was the first one, in a very public way to stick her neck out there."

Dr Irwin's achievement was also recognized when May 6, 2011 was declared **Lawn Pesticide Awareness Day** in honour of her leadership role in banning pesticides in North America by pushing for the adoption of the first by-law in Hudson.

Dr Irwin always eschewed accolades saying it was all about the collective effort and emphasized the need to keep vigilant about keeping up the pressure because, as she would say: *"It can always go backwards."*



Dr June Irwin (4th from the left), at the Paul Turkey (center) movie premiere. The Supreme Court Judge Claire L'Heureux-Dubé is 3rd from the left.

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Références:

1. "Mouse that Roared: Agenda Setting in Canadian Pesticide Politics" par Sarah Pralle
2. Videos sur June Irwin
 - <http://bit.ly/2vZjvhh>
 - <http://bit.ly/2weVcel>
3. Supreme Court Decision full text
4. "How one doctor fought giant pesticide and won"
5. Letter par June Irwin

****About the authors:***

This posthumous tribute was written by Ann Petersen-Anderson who is a member of the Hudson Food Collective in conjunction with two other anti-pesticide pioneers: Edith Smeesters, a biologist who was a key person to obtain the Quebec Pesticides Management Code (also a speaker on Alternatives to Pesticides with Equiterre) and Merryl Hammond, PhD in

*Community Health, founder of Citizens for Alternatives to Pesticides (CAP)
in Baie-D'Urfé.*

NORAHG Response

JUNE IRWIN — 1933 - 2017 !

Irwin was a non-expert, frustrated, aging, self-isolated, truth-challenged, homely spinster, and fanatical-activist who served NO useful purpose to society. As a mere dermatologist, she had absolutely NO training, NO expertise, and NO background in matters concerning pest control products. On the issue of pest control products, Irwin COULD NOT possibly know what she was talking about. In order to compensate for her lack of expertise, Irwin relied upon junk science and fake news, and affectionately became known as the clown witch of junk science.

In 1991, the town of Hudson became the first jurisdiction, ever, to arbitrarily impose prohibition against pest control products, like 2,4-D herbicide, in defiance of the fact that they were otherwise Health-Canada-approved, federally-legal, scientifically-safe, practically-non-toxic, and caused NO harm. Irwin conveniently ignored the overwhelming scientific evidence that proved the safety of these products. In fact, her wailing against pest control products was to seek revenge for being reprimanded by the town of Hudson for the disgustingly unsanitary conditions of her seventy-acre sheep farm. In retaliation, Irwin sought revenge by launching a junk science campaign against these products to ruin the beloved mature green spaces of the Hudson community.

Nonetheless, she has been falsely-acclaimed for anti-pesticide prohibition in the town of Hudson, Quebec, and all other prohibitions that followed. In fact, Jack Layton, a Hudson native who later became leader of New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP), played a far greater pivotal role in town's prohibition than Irwin. Irwin CAN be acclaimed, along with Layton and other co-conspirators, for destroying more lawn care businesses than almost any other group on the planet, since the town's prohibition was replicated in hundreds of jurisdictions, coast-to-coast. Consequently, thousands of lawn care businesses were extensively damaged and suffered catastrophic carnage and destruction, and tens of thousands of employees became victims of a wreckage of unemployment, despair, and destitution.

With her passing, Irwin's junk science campaign against pest control products has been silenced, forever. But, her trail of business carnage and human wreckage remains fresh in the minds of the professional lawn care industry. Observers have concluded that Irwin served NO useful purpose to society. They have been heard uttering the chant - *ding dong ... the clown witch of junk science, at last, is dead, and may she burn in*

hell for all of eternity. For more information about Irwin, please explore the following link ...

<http://pesticidetruths.com/2017/08/04/the-wicked-old-clown-witch-at-last-is-dead-june-irwin-1933-2017/>

We are the National Organization Responding Against HUJE that conspire to destroy the Green space and other industries (NORAHG). As a non-profit and independent organization, we are environmentalists who are dedicated to reporting about truth-challenged pesticide-hating fanatics (HUJE), like June Irwin, who conspire to destroy businesses that are dependent on the use of safe and effective conventional pest control products. NORAHG is the sworn enemy of lying, pompous, smug, uneducated, & pesticide-hating fanatical-activists, like June Irwin. We dare to defy these fanatics by exploring the whole truth from an independent perspective on The Pesticide Truths Web-Site ... <http://pesticidetruths.com/> If you wish to receive free reports on issues that concern you, please contact us at ... force.of.de.nature@gmail.com WILLIAM H GATHERCOLE AND NORAH G

NORAHG Response

IN THE IRWIN-ERA OF PROHIBITIONS, NO ONE WANTS TO LIVE IN #@!!% DANGEROUS & PEST-INFESTED URBAN LANDSCAPES THAT LOOK LIKE GARBAGE DUMPS !

We have NO objection to Irwin acolytes' choice of life-style, which, in this case, is a clear preference to live in an environment that looks like a pest-infested garbage dump. However, we DO object to the imposition of their choice on the majority of the community that DOES NOT want to live in this manner. The reckless and arbitrary impositions of Irwin-era prohibitions were not in the best interest of health and environment. It is a recognized fact that these prohibition have been unnecessary since pest control products are Health-Canada-approved, federally-legal, scientifically-safe, practically-non-toxic, and will cause NO harm. No one wants to live in #@!!% dangerous and pest-infested urban landscapes that look like garbage dumps, except Irwin acolytes ! Irwin-era prohibitions have never made our green spaces look so #@!!% ugly !

Irwin-era prohibitions resulted in catastrophic carnage caused by business failures, garbage dump green spaces, stunningly exorbitant costs, horrific fines, and even illness and death. Prohibitions have destroyed public and residential green spaces by turning them into garbage dumps. Here is a summary of garbage dump green spaces inflicted by #@!!% Irwin-era prohibitions ...

- children at high risk of tripping and becoming seriously hurt
- dandelions the dominant ground cover
- dead mature street trees
- hazardous slipping conditions in sports turf
- invasive noxious weeds like Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed
- lawns decimated by insects like white

grubs • lawns in entire neighborhoods ruined by pests • parks infested with weeds
• rose plantations dying and removed. This is the #@!!% prohibition carnage that
can be expected in any community that recklessly and arbitrarily imposed prohibition.

Reports About Catastrophic Carnage Caused By Irwin-Era Prohibitions —

<http://pesticidetruths.com/toc/carnage-leading-to-garbage-dumps/>

<http://pesticidetruths.com/toc/carnage-leading-to-garbage-dump-green-spaces-photo-gallery/>

<http://pesticidetruths.com/2014/01/19/emerald-ash-borer-wisconsin-municipalities-safe-effective-insecticide-treatments-versus-chain-saws-2014-01-05/>