



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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It is time for a ban on cosmetic pesticides

Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship Minister Gord Mackintosh has announced legislation on cosmetic pesticides that will finally bring Manitoba into step with the majority of other provinces in Canada. This is a significant positive step for the health of Manitoba families. Eliminating the use of toxic chemicals for lawn care is one of the most practical and effective steps we can take for our environment.

Manitobans recognize that toxic chemicals used for controlling weeds and insects on lawns put a needless strain on the environment and pose an unnecessary risk to human health. When the Manitoba Provincial Government conducted consultations last fall on options for regulating cosmetic pesticides, about 70 percent of Manitobans responded that they want the same protections for their children and the environment that residents of several other provinces already receive. These consultation results mirror poll results that show a large majority of Manitobans—71 per cent—support phasing out the use of cosmetic pesticides for lawn care.

Scientific evidence of risk related to pesticides is mounting. A study by the Ontario College of Family Physicians published last year examined 142 studies on the effects of pesticides on human health. They found that exposure to pesticides can lead to child neuro-development issues, including autism and attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder, and respiratory problems such as lung disease and asthma.

The chemical industry claims that Health Canada registration of their products assures their safety. However, registration is not equivalent to an absence of risk. In fact, all registered pesticides come with advice about how to minimize risks, such as wearing protective clothing, keeping pesticides away from pregnant women and reducing exposure to children.

According to Health Canada, “it is good practice to reduce or eliminate any unnecessary exposure to pesticides. Canadians can and should seek opportunities to minimize their exposure to and reduce their reliance on pesticides.”

Mackintosh is right to focus this legislation on protecting the health and safety of children. Children are at the most risk from pesticides. Young children may be unaware of the dangers of pesticides or may not recognize signs warning them to stay off treated grass. Their organs are still developing, they eat and drink more relative to their body weights than adults, and they spend more time playing close to the ground where pesticides may have been applied. Even more disturbingly, a recent study by Environmental Defence found 137 toxic chemicals including several pesticides in the bloodstreams of newborn children, indicating how pervasive these chemicals are in our environment. It is

there is an alternative.

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all of our responsibility to ensure an environment where children can be safe.

Scientists have also found that pesticides are a danger to the environment. Aquatic eco-systems are especially affected. With all the problems facing Manitoba's waterways, and Lake Winnipeg in particular, reducing unneeded pesticides should be a priority.

There are many non-synthetic alternatives and less toxic reduced risk pesticide products. Moreover, the best form of lawn care involves maintaining its health by aerating, overseeding and application of compost. Weeds are often a symptom of an unhealthy lawn, not the cause. With proper care of your lawn you do not need pesticides.

In 2001, the Supreme Court upheld a ban on cosmetic pesticides in the town of Hudson, Quebec. Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé wrote that "individually and collectively, we are responsible for preserving the natural environment. Environmental protection has emerged as a fundamental value in Canadian society." This decision enshrined into Canadian law the precautionary principle. When human life and the environment are at risk, governments should exercise caution, even in the absence of scientific certainty.

Since this ruling, most Canadian provinces have developed legislation protecting their citizens from needless risks posed by cosmetic pesticides. Manitoba is now poised to offer protections enjoyed by most other Canadians. Manitoba is playing catch up with other provinces. We can learn what has worked elsewhere to become a leader in strong and effective pesticide regulation.

There is more work to be done for reducing our exposure from toxic chemicals in our environment. In particular, this proposed legislation does

not deal with cosmetic pesticide use in indoor environments where children are present such as schools and day cares, a step the Minister should consider in the near future. Most importantly, legislation needs to be backed with education, so all Manitobans understand the risks associated with pesticides and the options and alternatives for maintaining our landscapes without resort to harmful chemicals.

Josh Brandon is an organizer with the coalition Cosmetic Pesticide Ban Manitoba.

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