

**Subject: Proposed Pesticide Use Control Bylaw**

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**From:** Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

**To:** Alan Nixon <alan\_nixon@dnv.org>, Ernie Crist <ernie\_crist@dnv.org>, Janice Harris <janice\_harris@dnv.org>, Jim Cuthbert <Jim\_Cuthbert@dnv.org>, Lisa Muri <lisa\_muri@dnv.org>, Maureen McKeon Holmes <Maureen\_McKeonHolmes@dnv.org>, Richard Walton <rwalton@dnv.org>, NVD Council <dnvcouncil@dnv.org>

**CC:** managecomm@dnv.org, James Ridge <James\_Ridge@dnv.org>, FONVCA <fonvca@fonvca.org>, Elizabeth James <cagebc@yahoo.com>

Mayor & Council:

For your information I'd thought I would forward an 2004 article from the Western Standard newsmagazine that will help to provide some balance on the issue of pesticides. I heard Dr. Cushman, Ottawa's medical health officer, on a radio debate not long ago, and let me just say that his arguments were pretty much destroyed by his opponent.

While I encourage you to read the whole Western Standard article copied below, the bottom is that, *"Whether the municipal politicians in Toronto and elsewhere, who are forcing homeowners to put up with weeds and other pests on their property, have even read the OCFP report before acting on it is tough to say. If they didn't, it's rather scary that they would pass meddling laws so recklessly. If they did read the report, and are proceeding with the intrusive bans in spite of the scientific evidence that pesticides are perfectly safe for typical urban usage, that's truly frightening."*

Brian Platts

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Weeding out nonsense in the debate over pesticides

Monday, 31 May 2004  
Cyril Doll

Around this time every year in Ontario, the same old joke begins making the rounds: "How can you tell it's spring? The Leafs are out." Once again, the clever double entendre has proven reliable. The Toronto Maple Leafs have hit the golf course early and the flora is abloom throughout central Canada. Only this year Torontonians have another spectator sport to occupy their spring: watching a bumper crop of dandelions, ragweed, crabgrass and a zillion other forms of nuisance weeds overwhelm their parks and yards. In April, Hogtown's municipal council banned the use of cosmetic pesticides, following a trend started back in 1990 in Hudson, Quebec, that has spread across the east, from the salty shores of Halifax to the hospital greens of Peterborough, Ontario. In addition to Toronto, several Ontario municipalities are either considering bans or have gone ahead and prohibited the use of weed and bug killers, citing studies that purport to show they're dangerously toxic to people.

In recent months, two separate reports have been released concerning chemical pest killers. The latest, a report on pesticides in American bloodstreams, was released by the Sierra Club of Canada in early May. The Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) released a widely reported study in April. Both reports conclude that virtually all forms of pesticides pose grave dangers to humans, linking them to cancer, neurological damage and reproductive problems. Since most municipalities don't have the facilities or the ability to do solid scientific research for themselves, many have been basing their policy proposals on the OCFP report.

But if weed and bug sprays are really a serious threat to the health of Canadians, why are they sold in virtually every hardware store in the country? And why is such an acute health risk being left to city councils to combat? If the threat is truly grave, you might expect the federal government to step in.

Actually, Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) has already screened pesticides available for sale in this country. "When we register a pesticide for use, we only register it if we believe it's not going to pose any adverse effect in regards to health and the environment," says Mary Mitchell, a toxicologist at the PMRA. She explains that the federal agency has scrutinized studies, taken the statistical risk levels that have been found to exist in the chemicals and, just to be safe, multiplied those risks one thousand times. The result? Even being ridiculously conservative, the pesticides were found to pose no real risk to humans, pets or, really, anything except pests.

How did the OCFP's report come to reach such alarmist conclusions as to recommend that all pesticides should be banned? "There are some limitations to the study," says Ian Morrison, former dean of agriculture at the University of Alberta. "I would have some serious questions about how they drew those conclusions [about the link to cancer] and what sort of epidemiological information they have--whether it's only a coincidental occurrence."

Actually, the OCFP report relies on studies that were focused in agricultural areas, where pesticides are used on crops in much

larger amounts, and where other factors, such as exposure to diesel fuel, fertilizers, dust and animal viruses wreak havoc with health statistics--not exactly a comparable scenario to the average Torontonion backyard. Not that the OCFP is trying to hide that. The report states on page 3 that "most of the studies done examine farmers, pesticide applicators, gardeners, and other occupational groups with higher exposures to pesticides than those of the general population." When "exposure history" was evaluated at all, it was "often indirect and may be determined by a surrogate measure, such as type of crop grown, annual expenditure on pesticides, or job description, rather than by direct evaluation of the exposed persons."

Whether the municipal politicians in Toronto and elsewhere, who are forcing homeowners to put up with weeds and other pests on their property, have even read the OCFP report before acting on it is tough to say. If they didn't, it's rather scary that they would pass meddling laws so recklessly. If they did read the report, and are proceeding with the intrusive bans in spite of the scientific evidence that pesticides are perfectly safe for typical urban usage, that's truly frightening.

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