

Newfoundland & Labrador Pesticide Brief

Judie Squires

What are Pesticides?

Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides and fungicides. They are toxins designed to kill insects, plants and fungi. Pesticides contain “active” ingredients, and so-called “inert” ingredients. These are considered trade secrets, and although in many cases they can be even more toxic than “active” chemicals, most consumers are completely unaware they exist. Even when used as directed, pesticides have many negative side effects on human health and the environment.

Pesticides in Canada

The lack of adequate protection from exposure to cosmetic pesticides at the federal and provincial level has fueled a growing stream of municipal pesticide restrictions designed to offer some protection of the environment, water quality and public health.

As of June 2006, the number of municipalities who have enacted pesticide by-laws in Canada was 120. Since that time, additional pesticide by-laws have been enacted and/or are at the draft stage pending adoption.

Almost every province in Canada has municipalities that have enacted pesticide bylaws, including the entire province of Quebec. Regrettably, Newfoundland is not one of those provinces. Not one municipality in Newfoundland and Labrador has taken steps toward giving our citizens that same level of protection.

According to a 2001 census, there were over 11 million Canadians, or 36.5% of Canada's total population protected from pesticides, at the current date this figure has greatly increased. Again Newfoundland & Labradoreans have not been offered this same level of protection.

Health risks of pesticides

Many respected organizations agree that the risks of pesticide exposure simply outweigh any possible benefit. Some of the many supporters of a pesticide ban are, The Ontario College of family physicians, Lung association, Cancer society, Allergy and Environmental Health Association, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Association of early childhood educators, Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association, Dr. Margaret Sanborne and Dr. Meg Sears just to name just a few.

In 2004, after a comprehensive review of pesticide research, the Ontario College of Family Physicians recommended avoiding pesticides. The [Ontario College of Family Physicians Environmental Health Committee](#) has a brochure for family physicians on the topic.

Reviewing more than 250 recent studies from around the world, they found consistent links between pesticides and serious illnesses such as cancer, reproductive problems and neurological diseases. They found that children were especially vulnerable.

The Canadian Institute of Child Health are asking that all municipalities pass by-laws and regulations that better protect the health of Canadian children by reducing their exposure to pesticides to the unavoidable minimum.

Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment has been active in informing the public about the health effects of pesticides, and has worked with other groups to push for legislation that reduces the use of pesticides. CAPE's [position paper](#) on pesticides and video are available on their web site.

The risks of landscape pesticides are well outlined in the Toronto Public Health report and the Ontario college of family physicians report. There are known human health and environmental effects, and many more suspected effects.

According to Dr. Nicole Bruinsma of the Canadian Public Health Association, women accumulate contaminants in their bodies and excrete them in breast milk thus subsequently passing them on to the newborn. **The most dangerous contaminants for the child are those which affect brain development because of the brain's rapid growth at this stage such as pesticides.**

Rob Rutledge, a Radiation Oncologist at the Nova Scotia Cancer Centre, at the QE II Health Centre who specializes in breast, prostate and pediatric cancers. He addressed the relationship between pesticides and cancer. He said cancer is not the only health effect of pesticides. There are immune-allergy effects, neurological-developmental effects, respiratory effects including asthma, dermatology effects and reproductive effects.

Theo Colborn, Ph.D., director of the Endocrine Disruption Exchange, Inc., warns in an article published in Environmental Health Perspectives (Vol. 114, No. 1) that the current pesticide regulatory system does not adequately protect the public from the neurodevelopmental effects of pesticides.

There have been many studies and the findings have been consistent that pesticides increase the risk of cancer in humans. <http://www.environmentalhealth.ca/june00rutledge.html>

Acute Effects: The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety has identified acute health effects in humans including nausea, eye, skin, respiratory and throat irritation, muscle spasms, and even death (3).

Chronic effects: Repeated exposure to pesticides has been linked to neurological problems, brain and lung cancer, immune suppression (which creates environmental hypersensitivity), leukaemia, Parkinson's disease, kidney damage, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and reproductive disorders, including endocrine disruption, low sperm count, and sterility.

What is Newfoundland & Labrador doing to protect or citizens?

Several groups and individuals with limited to zero funds have tried relentlessly to lobby Municipal and Provincial governments in our province to no avail. Not one municipality has taken the steps to protect their citizens claiming they do not have the power to do so, this is simply incorrect. On a Provincial level, it has only been the last three years that our province employed pesticide control officers after much lobbying on my part. Provincial regulations are lax at best and with two pesticide control officers for our entire province, the regulations that are in place are almost impossible to enforce.

The bottom line is, there is no protection for the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador.

What needs to be done?

Public education campaigns are a must. What makes tobacco smoke so toxic? Why chemicals, many of which are pesticides of course. Public education campaigns on how to reduce pesticide exposure and the risks they pose to children, pregnant women, the elderly, immune compromised, every citizen, water quality, wildlife and our environment are of utmost importance!

Lobbying municipalities to enact pesticide bylaws to protect their citizens is crucial. Newfoundland and Labradoreans deserve the same level of protection as other Canadians.

When Canada's most respected health authorities tell us pesticides threaten our health, we should all be listening.

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