

## A Bylaw To Control The Cosmetic Use of Pesticides?

# Myth vs Reality

**Myth:** **Pesticides have no harmful effect on our health and our environment.**

**Reality:**

An extremely dangerous myth to promote. Studies have associated many of the common lawn and garden pesticides we use to birth defects, developmental delays, motor dysfunction, nervous system disruption and immunotoxicity. 2,4-D, the most widely used lawn pesticide, is widely contaminated with dioxin, a known carcinogen, and associated with increased rates of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and prostate cancer.

As well, a 1998 Environment Canada study found that water in the Don and Humber rivers was contaminated with lawn care pesticides. In fact, some of these amounts exceeded Ontario's water quality guidelines for aquatic life.

**Myth:** **Only fringe environmentalists are pushing for pesticide bylaws.**

**Reality:**

Simply not true. Many organizations and bodies throughout Canada recognize the harm associated with the non-essential use of pesticides. For example:

- There is a growing list of health and labour organizations who support pesticide bylaws, including: the Canadian Cancer Society; the Ontario College of Family Physicians; the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario; the Ontario Public Health Association, the Association of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario; the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment; the United Steelworkers of America and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.
- Many municipalities have passed similar by-laws – including Halifax, Cobalt, Ontario and 50 Quebec municipalities. Montreal is developing a bylaw for residential properties on the island and Quebec is currently tabling a bill to phase out the use of cosmetic pesticides for the whole province.
- Polls have shown that 82% of Ontarians support pesticide by-laws.

**Myth:** **Pesticides are safe to use. If they were unsafe, Federal or Provincial government would ban their use.**

**Reality:**

The Federal government permits the sale of cigarettes in Canada, but doesn't consider smoking safe. Like cigarettes, pesticides registered for sale in Canada are not deemed "safe" by the Federal Government. In fact, the Hon. Anne MacLellan, Minister of Health, has publicly recognized municipalities' ability to further restrict pesticides through bylaws as a complimentary approach to the Federal government's regulation of these chemicals. The Supreme Court of Canada echoed this recognition in the Hudson, Quebec by-law case.

**Myth:** **Pesticide bylaws are just another limitation of personal freedom.**

**Reality:**

Like Toronto's anti-smoking bylaw, a pesticide bylaw is not really about limiting personal freedom. It is about protecting people, especially children, from involuntary exposures to these toxic chemicals when walking on or by a lawn, or having a neighbor who uses pesticides.

**Myth:** The use of pesticides is necessary to keep our lawns and gardens attractive and weed free.

**Reality:** There are many alternatives to using harmful pesticides on our lawns and gardens and these alternatives are readily available every day to the average homeowner. The members of the Organic Landscape Association, a non-profit trade association, offer organic lawncare services and run an advice hotline to help do-it-yourself gardeners get their lawns off pesticides. Loblaws has realized the marketing opportunities of organic lawncare and gardening and is going “pesticide-free” in its gardening centres through out Canada. Starting in the spring of 2003, they will fill their shelves with effective alternatives to pesticides and hold community workshops on pesticide-free lawn and garden care.

**Myth:** A pesticides bylaw would limit the City’s ability to address health concerns by effectively controlling allergens, infestations, epidemics or other health risks.

**Reality:** An effective bylaw would prohibit the use of non-essential pesticides for cosmetic purposes, while permitting their use to deal with specific public health-related issues, according to the professional judgement of qualified public health officials

**Myth:** The pesticide industry can voluntarily reduce their pesticide use to an acceptable level.

**Reality:** While it is true that some lawncare companies have voluntarily reduced the volume of pesticides used, this trend is certainly not across the board and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to reliably measure. Voluntary measures are simply industry self-regulation. We are told that the industry will monitor itself and audit its members. But, the information gathered to measure progress will not be publicly available nor subject to access to information laws. Without the ability to reliably measure progress, such an approach lacks accountability. Moreover, when we hear assurances that voluntary reductions of up to 85% of pesticide use are possible, it begs the question: why have they been using 85% too much? Nor does simply a smaller amount of unnecessary pesticide use provide an acceptable level of exposure. Acceptable to whom? Cosmetic pesticide use is simply unnecessary at any level.

**Myth:** A pesticides bylaw will put lawn care companies out of business.

**Reality:** Again, simply not true. Lawncare services are still a viable industry without pesticides. For example, members of the Organic Landscape Association, a non-profit trade association, are experiencing annual growth rates of up to 30% in satisfied customers of pesticide free lawns and gardens. Traditional lawncare companies can make the transition to organic lawncare with relative ease. One new recruit to the Organic Landscape Association experienced no significant economic impacts in changing over to organic methods and actually reported new business growth within two years of going pesticide free.

**Myth:** Golf course and other businesses who maintain lawns and gardens will experience increased costs.

**Reality:** Many companies have found cost-savings by avoiding the use of non-essential pesticides. For example, the Granite Club, a premiere golf club near Toronto,

reduced costs by \$40,000 through cutting its pesticide use in half and still has pristine greens. Municipalities, school boards and other public sector organizations have seen similar cost savings for up to ten years in some cases.

**Myth:** **Lawncare pesticides are only two percent of pesticides used, getting rid of them won't make a difference.**

**Reality:** The two percent statistic comes from a Canada-wide industry survey on sales that is not available for third party critique, and certainly holds little relevance for Ontario and Toronto, where the numbers are much higher. In 1993, an Ontario government survey concluded that professional applicators alone were applying 1,302,086 kg of pesticides for cosmetic reasons, which accounted for 21 percent of the provincial total of outdoor pesticide use. Add in homeowners who apply the pesticides themselves and this percentage would surely increase significantly.

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