

May13, 2005

Letter to the editor, Leader Post and Star Phoenix

Saskatoon bylaw debate is moot (or irrelevant)

The idea of a pesticide bylaw in Saskatoon has certainly opened a can of worms. Since May 3rd, 2005, columns and articles in The Regina Leader-Post and the Saskatoon Star Phoenix, as well as a guest on the Gormley show have given common sense a blow. Anyone favouring a pesticide bylaw has been variously called boo-hoos and superstitious ("Pesticide ban boo-hoos don't let science get in the way"; Tue 03 May 2005; The Saskatoon Star Phoenix by Les MacPherson), "heretics", and "zealot groups who scare people to raise money" (May 4th Gormley show).

The public is led to believe that science and scientists are objective (MacPherson), and Lorne Hepworth and CropLife Canada are given the role of objective experts in the pesticide debate ("Proposed pesticide ban would be Canada's toughest", Tue 10 May 2005; The Regina Leader-Post by Rod Nickel).

We are given an important quote without a name attached to it ("Pesticide ban a can of worms", Sat 07 May 2005; The Saskatoon Star Phoenix, by Randy Burton) and made to believe ourselves idiots if we don't blindly believe that the federal government's pesticide assessments are objective (MacPherson, Jay Lehr on the Gormley show).

What I see here, fanned by Lorne Hepworth and CropLife Canada, is a lot of speculation and fear mongering in an attempt at killing in the bud any talk of pesticide restrictions which could affect the industry's bottom line. No pesticide bylaw would be acceptable to industry in a province using 36% of Canadian Pesticides¹, and almost 1/2 of all the pesticides applied to crops in the Canadian prairies.² I guess that is why Jay Lehr from the Heartland Institute in Chicago "coincidentally" visits Saskatoon when there is talk of a bylaw. His inaccurate presentation and comments matched the pesticide industry's position to a T.

Every single Canadian municipality, the Quebec government, and now any US city or state that ever even thought about a pesticide ban, or even a pesticide use notification system, has been similarly deluged with pesticide industry "information campaigns". It is to be expected, as such interventions are indeed planned by CropLife as described in their annual reports³. They must spend millions of dollars to convince everyone of their "truth". Indeed, the statement that a bylaw implies a ban of (ALL) pesticides registered by the PMRA was used by industry in Toronto and Regina. In Toronto, as the bylaw fight came around at the same time as decisions regarding spraying for West Nile virus, industry also widely falsely advertised that a bylaw would mean that there would be no means of controlling mosquitoes, for which they were publicly rebuked by the Toronto health department.

No one can expect an industry where a "three per cent sales increase brought total sales to \$1.31 billion in 2003" in Canada⁴ not to protect their financial interest when it is perceived as being threatened. Bylaws threaten that. This alone should indicate the pesticide industry's lack of objectivity in the matter.

¹ House of Commons Standing Committee On Environment and Sustainable Devt; May 2000; Pesticides Making the Right Choice

² Env. Canada; Sept 2001; "Agricultural Pesticides and the Atmosphere"; Science and the Environment Bulletin; http://www.ec.gc.ca/science/sandesept01/article3_e.html

³ CropLife Canada 2003-2004 report under "The need to inform the public" and "Urban pest Management Council; 2002-03 under "Urban pest Management Council"

⁴ CropLife Canada 2003-2004 report, under Pest control products sales in Canada realize growth; <http://www.croplife.ca/english/aboutcpi/annualreport.html>

The reality is that the PMRA has a reduced risk pesticide list, which was updated on May 13, 2005.⁵ The reality is that there are independent third party associations who have their own lists of allowable products such as the Organic Materials Safety Institute (OMRI) and the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) Organic Standards. Adopting such a standard frees a municipality from their need and expense for “expertise” as well as updating of a list.

The reality is that Canada will be functioning under the old 1962 Act until the regulations for the new Pest Control Products Act are all in place, which is not yet the case. The extra factor of 10 recommended for protection of children? It is not consistently applied, and became a 3 for 2,4-D re-evaluation **Error! Bookmark not defined.**⁶ Although the same document recognizes the synergistic relationship of mecoprop and dicamba with 2,4-D, there was no attempt at “consider(ing) cumulative effects of pesticides that act in the same way” as is stated in the new Act. The bibliography published was incomplete by the PMRA’s own admission, and the industry-sponsored studies on which the re-evaluation is based were not available for independent review. Please don’t believe me. Send this last paragraph or two to the PMRA infoline at PMRA_INFOSERV@hc-sc.gc.ca and await their answer.

The purpose of the Saskatchewan Network for Alternatives to Pesticides Inc (SNAP) is to ensure that accurate information on pesticides and alternative strategies is part of the debate.

Sincerely yours,

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⁵ Update on Reduced-Risk Pesticides in Canada (RR2005-01) May 13, 2005 - 388Kb
<http://www.pmra-arla.gc.ca/english/pubs/rr-e.html>

⁶ Re-evaluation of the Lawn and Turf Uses of (2,4-Dichlorophenoxy)acetic Acid [2,4-D] (PACR2005-01) February 21, 2005 - 555Kb
<http://www.pmra-arla.gc.ca/english/pdf/pacr/pacr2005-01-e.pdf>

