

## **Flash Sheet #7 Environment -Pesticides - Gracia Janes, Convener**

The issue of pesticide use and abuse is high on municipal radar screens this year, as the Supreme Court ruling allowing Hudson Quebec and some Ontario Municipalities to protect their citizens through restrictive by-laws begins to sink in. Councils of Women members across the country are following this issue closely, some of them being attached to breast cancer support groups fighting against pesticide use, and some having followed the issue closely for many years. Many of us have written letters to our MPs and MPPs, and some, such as Margaret MacGee of London, Ontario have written and presented briefs to City Councils. As well, Councils of Women Nationally and Provincially have presented resolutions and briefs to their respective governments.

Given the topical nature of the issue ( eg. Toronto just passed a restrictive by-law and is being taken to court by the pesticide companies) I thought it would be of interest for our members and other interested people to see what is happening in St. Catharines Ontario, and so have enclosed the following brief sent to the St. Catharines Parks and Recreation Department this May - which was forwarded to City Council members with other background from the Parks and Recreation Department

### **ST CATHARINES & DISTRICT COUNCIL OF WOMEN**

Established 1918

**Brief to: The St. Catharines City Council**

**From the: St. Catharines and District Council of Women**

May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003 -Gracia Janes Environment Convener, for Cynthia Dobrindt, President

**Re: Discussions Regarding Restrictions or Prohibitions of Pesticide Use on Private Lands**

#### **Introduction**

The St. Catharines and District Council of Women, representing 23 affiliated groups and 30 individual members, from a wide diversity of backgrounds and interests eg. Girl Guides of Canada, Lakecrest Division and Emergency Nurses Association of Ontario, Group G, welcomes this opportunity to comment on the current Council discussion on the possibility of its placing restrictions, or prohibiting the use of pesticides on private lands. Our comments are based on long established, democratically developed, Council of Women policy, including that of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC est. 1893) and the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario (PCWO est. 1923)

The St. Catharines Recreation and Community Services Department is to be commended for its many efforts to reduce the use of pesticides and inorganically-processed fertilizers on city-owned lands; its cessation of pesticide applications on the City's passive parks, class C sports fields, nurseries and Arboretum; its plans to phase out pesticides on such areas as A and B sports fields by 2004; and, its many naturalization efforts at city-owned golf courses. 1.

Despite this, in light of the growing evidence of the harm pesticides and inorganic fertilizers cause, the

opportunities for the use of alternatives<sup>2</sup>; the growing number of homes using such methods, and recently, the successful Hudson Supreme Court case that allows cities across Canada to protect the health and welfare of their citizens, it is our opinion, that :

- 1. St. Catharines City Council should shorten the St. Catharines Recreation and Community Services Department time lines for the cessation of the use of pesticides and inorganically-processed fertilizers to 2003.**
- 2. St. Catharines City Council should pass a by-law to prohibit the cosmetic use of pesticides on private lands.**
- 3. The St. Catharines Recreation and Community Services Department should work with the Regional Public Health Department to educate the public about the most up to date information regarding the dangers of pesticide use to the environment and public health, and the many alternatives available for their use .**
- 4. St. Catharines City Council should urge the Provincial and Federal Governments to play a significant role stopping the use of harmful pesticides for cosmetic uses.**

### **History of Council of Women Policy**

For several years Councils of Women have recognized the potential dangers of pesticides to public health and the environment, and have addressed our concerns to the Federal and Provincial governments, as well as local members of Provincial and Federal parliaments, on a number of occasions

As early as 1982 the National Council of Women of Canada urged the federal government to “**exert more control over the use of pesticides**”, and twenty years later in 2002 to “**provide leadership to eliminate the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes.**”

In 1988 the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urged the provincial government to “**investigate and report on the increasing use of pesticides and herbicides, particularly 2-4D; to document the effects with regard to our environment and ecosystem; and if required, initiate a phase-out system for those found to be harmful and undertake a complete ban as required.**”

(We are pleased that the Government of Quebec recently passed a law which will strictly regulate , and in some cases prohibit the “cosmetic’ use of pesticides.<sup>3</sup>)

In 1989 Council went even further, asking the government to “**ban the use of all questionable pesticides, especially 2-4D, Chlordane and Aldrin; to phase out existing supplies over a shorter period, and ensure that use of these products are discontinued according to regulations.**” In 1997 PCWO asked the government to “**phase out the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes**”, and in 2000, well before the Federal Court Hudson case ruling, asked the Government of Ontario “**to pass legislation to enable municipalities to restrict or ban the use of pesticides on private property, and encourage the use of safe and natural alternatives through education.**”

### **Rationale Behind the Council Policy**

A good example of how Council of Women develops and uses its policies can be found in the NCWC Brief to the Pesticide Registration Review Team in October of 1990.

For some time before its first stated policy was presented and voted on in 1982, Council of Women maintained (as it does to this day) a ‘watching brief’ i.e. collecting facts on the issue, developing suitable policies, and presenting resolutions and briefs to government.

In the case of the above mentioned brief, National Council reviewed the proposed federal oversight plans, relevant background papers, such as the Fifth Annual Report of the International Joint Commission, (IJC) and even scientific papers from the 2,4-D field tests at Guelph University <sup>4</sup>.

In citing the need for caution, Council quoted the IJC warning that “ **human health is threatened as a result of exposure to even low ambient levels of persistent toxic chemicals.**” and, that the ‘Guelph field tests’ regarding persistence of 2,4-D, based on studies done over several years “ showed that it took about 7 days for dissipation (of the herbicide) to 50% in soils. In water, 5% could be recovered after 15 days and in turf grass foliage, from 6% on day one, to < 1% after a week.”<sup>5</sup>.

We note that a recent study by Environment Canada, the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario, released in December of 2002, has shown that the **pesticides used on lawns of home owners in Toronto are polluting urban rivers such as the Don and the Humber.** <sup>6</sup>

As well, “**the Canadian Cancer society has called for a halt to the so-called “ornamental” use of pesticides, where lawns and turf are sprayed to enhance their appearance**” <sup>7</sup>...and, in a letter to the Federal Commons Standing Committee on Health in June, the Cancer Society stated that “ **Studies in peer reviewed journals indicate there is a link between exposure to some components of pesticides and an increased risk of cancer.**”<sup>8</sup>.

Perhaps most telling, in June 2000 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) achieved an end to the retail sales of the common house and garden pesticide chlorpyrifos, sold under the trade names Dursban and Lorsdan. The company which produced these products had ‘voluntarily’ agreed to take them off the shelf in the USA in response to the **EPA decision that they posed a hazard to youngsters because of their potential effects on the nervous system and brain** <sup>9</sup>. We note here, that although it had been studying chlorpyrifos since June 1999, Canada did not act as quickly and it was used on gardens in Niagara and elsewhere for a while longer.

### **Some Encouraging Signs**

In December 2000, Health Canada indicated an intent to ban, but then welcomed a “voluntary’ recall by manufacturers of diazinon a common house and garden pesticide, used indoors as an ant and roach killer, and outdoors to kill garden and lawn pests, as it was “**believed to be especially toxic to children, even at low doses**”<sup>9</sup>. Health Canada has since almost completely phased out chlorpyrifos and will phase out diazinon by 2004 “**because the chemicals failed to meet the agency’s new safety requirements for children.**”<sup>10</sup>

Presently Health Canada is reviewing the popular herbicide 2,4-D, in use for many years on golf courses, turfs and lawns, along with dicamba mecaprop often sold under the innocent sounding label of Trillion, and may initiate a ban soon <sup>11</sup>.

Public awareness and involvement are growing. This is evidenced by the many municipalities such as Hudson, Quebec and Halifax to pass prohibitive by-laws that significantly reduce, or even ban, pesticide use for cosmetic purposes, and for many other cities to initiate intense public education programs around the dangers of chemical use, particularly for children.

As well, there are more and more presentations being made to municipal councils by citizens; Loblaws has made the decision to be "pesticide free by 2003" ( see enclosure) 12. , thus moving to stop the sale of pesticides in over 400 garden stores in Canada; **an increased number of chemical lawn care companies (many small family companies and some quite large and established )** are providing the alternative pesticide - free lawn care; and, a growing number of municipalities such as St. Catharines are stopping/or phasing out pesticide use and chemically produced fertilizers on City lands.

**Perhaps most importantly, a significant number of very healthy looking lawns in Niagara are sprouting the beautiful little signs proclaiming "totally green lawn care- no pesticides".**

### **Some Questions**

In conclusion, as Council reviews the information it receives from its Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department , and determines if it will take a lead role in this vital issue in order to protect the environment and the health of its citizens, we would respectfully request that it consider the following questions:

1. Given that the Supreme Court of Canada, has ruled that municipalities can pass by-laws to prohibit pesticides, what would prevent St. Catharines from doing so?
2. If Halifax, Hudson et al believe they can enforce a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides (despite the ability of citizens to continue to purchase pesticides) why can't St. Catharines? A comparison might be, that people can purchase cigarettes, yet municipalities enforce restrictive by-laws.
3. What is there to prevent the City Council from working with the Regional Health Department, as is the case in Toronto, to make the public and upper-tier governments more aware of the environmental and health threats of pesticide use and the increasing number of alternative options?
4. Given that the City Recreation and Community Services Department, a growing number of citizens and gardening companies (eg Green Lawn Care, Envirosteam, and even the established companies such as Chemlawn) are using alternatives to pesticides, **why are we presuming the majority of the public will not join in this movement to protect human health and the environment?**

### **\*Background:**

1. Minutes of St. Catharines City Council July 8th/02, report. Parks, Recreation and Services Dept.
2. "The healthy garden".Steve Whysall .Canadian Press. St. Catharines Standard. April 23, 2003.
3. Press Release. Government of Quebec."Health, Environment, Pesticides. Quebec Adopts Highest Standards in North America to Decrease Exposures to Pesticides."March 22/03.
4. An interim Report Summarizing Toxicological Research, Sponsored by the Industry Task Force on 2,4-D-Research Data, and Brief Review of Environmental Effects. Dr. W.R. Mullison.Guelph University. July 1986.
5. *ibid.*
6. Don, Humber contaminated by pesticides , study finds. Jonathan Fowlie.Globe and Mail. December 19th/02.
7. Decisions on pesticide use to be made in the spring. Toronto Star. December 30th/02.
8. *ibid.*
9. Canada may phase out pesticide. St. Catharines Standard. December 2000
10. Health Canada to ban pesticide. Doctors welcome voluntary recall by maker of diazonon. Toronto Star..December 7<sup>th</sup> /02.
11. Health Canada may ban popular pesticide. Agency looks at 2,4-D as possible cancer risk. St. Catharines Standard .December 30/02.
12. Loblaws garden centres go green - no chemicals by 2003. Donna Flavelle. Toronto Star. March 12/02