

New federal bill won't reduce reliance on pesticides: critics

Environmental groups say a long-awaited update of Canada's 33-year-old Pest Control Products Act (PCPA) is a significant move forward but it still does not go far enough in shifting Canadians away from their reliance on pesticides.

Canada's current pesticide law controls approximately 6000 products, many of which were approved in the 1960s and 1970s. PCPA 2002, due for passage in the Commons by summer, legislates mandatory reporting of adverse events and fines of up to \$500 000. It also calls for the re-evaluation of all existing pesticides and automatic reviews every 15 years. It provides more protection for children because the evaluation process

considers chemicals' cumulative effect.

The legislation also opens the activities of Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), which manages the regulation of pesticides, to public scrutiny. Pesticide evaluation reports, including previously confidential industry information, will be available to the public. Currently, the public must use Access to Information rules to obtain study information.

Both the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) and the World Wildlife Federation Canada (WWFC) welcome the new act, but want a commitment to pesticide reduction set as a broad goal.

"It's disappointing that the bill does precious little to address the needs of farmers and landscapers who want easier access to lower-risk products available elsewhere in the world," says Sarah Dover, policy adviser to the WWFC.

These products, such as corn gluten, which is used to keep weeds at bay, aren't patentable or readily available.

Dr. Kapil Khatter, CAPE's executive director, adds that the new act isn't strong enough. For example, mandatory reviews 15 years after registration sound good in theory, but these evaluations can take up to 20 years, during which time the product stays on the market. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

PULSE

"Be wise, immunize" message getting through

Data collected for the Canadian Public Health Association indicate that 92% of Canadian parents believe it is important that their children be vaccinated. Similarly, 91% agree that childhood vaccines take pressure off the health care system and 90% think all standard vaccines should be administered to all children. A small proportion of parents (5%) think

vaccination is unnecessary because they think vaccine-preventable diseases have been completely eradicated. Although 92% of respondents think the government should fund all vaccinations, 96% indicated that they would pay personally to vaccinate their children.

The majority of parents (59%) are completely confident that vaccination

is beneficial, while another 25% are very confident. Reasons cited for a lack of confidence include "you can still contract the disease" (37%), "vaccines cause other problems" (22%) and "vaccines cause bad reactions" (11%).

Disease prevention was most frequently mentioned by Canadian parents as the most important factor in the decision to vaccinate children (21%), followed by physician recommendations (15%), safety (15%) and effectiveness (12%). When asked to rank their level of concern about the seriousness of specific diseases on a scale of 0 to 10, 95% of parents rated meningitis 8 or higher; hepatitis B got that ranking from 84% of parents, polio, 82%. Meanwhile, 93% said their children had been vaccinated against polio, compared with 30% against hepatitis B and 29% against meningitis.

Although parents tended to be much less concerned about the severity of measles, with only 35% according the disease a severity ranking of 8 or higher, 92% said their children had been vaccinated against it. — *Shelley Martin, Senior Analyst, Research, Policy and Planning Directorate, CMA*

