

## Media Release

Coalition for a Healthy Ottawa  
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### Physicians and Scientists call for Action on Pesticides used for Landscaping

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Ottawa – As scientific evidence mounts that pesticides used on lawns and gardens cause harm, the Coalition for a Healthy Ottawa calls for political action to protect human health and the environment. With over 40% of Canadians protected from toxic chemicals used for landscaping, Ottawa experts are looking for provincial commitments to least-toxic pest control strategies where the most vulnerable people live, work and play.

In an issue update, Ottawa Public Health recommends strong measures based upon some recent studies. Other evidence of the health and environmental damage of pesticides greatly bolsters this conclusion.

“Pesticides are spread in the environment specifically to be toxic. The chemicals used on lawns, along with contaminants, breakdown products and additives, affect virtually every system in the body,” said spokesperson Dr. Meg Sears.

“Early exposures have lifelong consequences for our children and may even harm subsequent generations. Pesticides may contribute to a variety of disorders including birth defects, developmental disorders, and childhood cancers,” adds CHEO Head of Paediatrics, Dr. Joe Reisman.

Haematologist and researcher Dr. Richard van der Jagt stated, “recent population studies, genetic studies and basic molecular studies make it crystal clear that 2,4-D, used to kill weeds on lawns, causes non-Hodgkin lymphoma.” Facing increasingly crowded clinics, he adds, “Canada has the dubious distinction of being a world leader in this cancer, with a rapidly increasing incidence. It is clear that childhood leukemia is linked to non-essential use of pesticides in the household, as is adult leukemia. Other hormonally-linked cancers, of the breast and prostate are also rising rapidly. These are fuelled by endocrine disruption which may be caused by components of pesticides. Because of the effect of pesticides on the genetic expression in cells, there is link between pesticide use and other cancers as well, such as brain cancer.”

Biology Professor David Lean stated, “Pesticides do not stay on lawns. They travel far, affecting many organisms such as birds, fish, amphibians and insects. Most recently the pesticide chiefly used to kill grubs in turf was implicated in colony collapse of bees. We now see that farmers need restrictions on non-essential pesticide use to protect the pollinators they depend upon.”

Professor Scott Findlay, Director of the Institute of the Environment at the University of Ottawa explained, “Given that the pesticides used in gardens and lawns provide few socioeconomic and health benefits, the acceptable risk threshold for their use is low. Yet evidence of significant health risks of pesticide exposure is accumulating, suggesting that the acceptable risk threshold is exceeded. Hence, pesticide use in lawns and gardens should be phased out. As there is also evidence that voluntary reduction programs do not work, the obvious solution is mandatory restrictions.”

If you want the nicest yard on the street, you’ll ask someone like agronomist Frank Reddick how to do it. After decades in the pesticide industry he left, and now successfully manages residential lawns, playing fields and large properties with the safest of products. He explains, “the secret is to test the soil for a broad range of nutrients, supplement it to optimize the conditions for growing turf, plant a lot of high-quality seed, and ensure proper watering and cutting. Use nematodes to fight grubs.”

There can be no better time than Child Cancer Awareness week to move decisively on laws requiring least-toxic solutions to pest problems, particularly following the release of a comprehensive report, “Prescription for a Healthy Canada” (see [davidsuzuki.org](http://davidsuzuki.org)) during the Canadian Public Health Association conference in Ottawa.

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For more information, please contact:  
Meg Sears PhD 613 832-2806 or 613 297-6042  
Richard van der Jagt MD, FRCP (C) 613 737-8804  
Frank Reddick 705 309-1400