

Leukemia - The Pesticide Garden Cancer.

The following article sadly reflects how pesticides used on lawns are killing our children (even when their parents don't use pesticides) and the important role our parks departments play in keeping our kids healthy.

The article was prepared before the City of Toronto's April 2004 Pesticide Bylaw was in effect.

" 'TEA' Leader Chastises Council - Toronto Slashes \$ From Pesticide-Free Plan

One of my daughter's best friends died earlier this month. Jeffrey was diagnosed with leukemia when he was six years old.

"It's the garden variety type," the doctors assured Jeff's parents, meaning that his chances of complete recovery were quite high.

After eight years of treatment, the disease did go into remission. Unfortunately, the cancer returned and, last week, while undergoing one of the final stages of treatment, Jeff died. He was fourteen.

One of the questions Jeffrey's parents were asked when he was first diagnosed with this terrible disease was "Do you use pesticides?"

Jeff's parents did not, but in our lawn rich North York community, many of our neighbours did. Spray and pesticide applications were the norm on our playgrounds, schoolyards and parks.

What exactly are the consequences of exposing our children to dangerous chemicals such as lawn care pesticides?

Consider the following:

Several comprehensive studies of farmers in Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas, by the National Cancer Institute in the US, have linked exposure to 2,4-D the pesticide of choice by urbanites to control dandelions to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma;

A study published in the December, 2000 issue of the journal Cancer, children whose mothers were exposed to pesticides were more than twice as likely to have non-Hodgkin's lymphoma;

A National Cancer Institute study says children are six times more likely to get childhood leukemia when pesticides are used in the home and garden;

A recent study of Mexican children found impaired neurological development in those children exposed to pesticides compared to children living in a pesticide-free community;

We have made some progress here at home. Our parks, playgrounds and sports fields are pretty safe places for our young ones to roll around on because, unlike many private lawns in Toronto, most of our parks have not had pesticide applications since 1999.

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Why did the spraying stop? Our City Councillors and parks department staff believed that the dangers to both human health and the environment linked to pesticide exposure were not worth continuation of the pesticide program.

This precautionary approach to green space maintenance was confirmed with the adoption last year of the City's first-ever Environmental Plan.

In it, the parks department experts recommended that Toronto spend about \$450,000 to fully implement their pesticide-free program, for training, new equipment and leading edge horticultural advice on how to maintain parks without dousing them in spray.

Yet, in a stunning display of shortsightedness, the City's budget committee denied the Parks department's reasonable request for resources to complete Toronto's pesticide-free plans. And so, our children stand to lose a safe environment in which to play a right guaranteed by the Toronto Children's Charter because those who govern lack foresight, vision and creativity.

Without a properly funded maintenance program, it will be very difficult for the city to continue with the pesticide-free program.

If dandelions take over our parks, watch for councillors who represent the manicured lawn set to demand a return to pesticide spraying. Already within the parks department there are rumblings about implementing programs that include spot spraying.

There are creative ways to handle this situation.

When San Francisco decided to go organic, other departments, agencies, boards and commissions within the municipality that were using pesticides, transferred a portion of their budget to the parks department to fund the new program.

The City of Waterloo, which has reduced pesticide use to almost zero in the past decade, has realized a 53% reduction in its park's maintenance budget. This is because the program was adequately funded and supported from the beginning.

Refusing less than half a million dollars to properly implement a pesticide-free parks maintenance program is another example of the nickel and dime tactics of the Budget Committee members.

The short-term savings ignore the long-term health and environmental costs of pesticide applications and the potential long-term benefits of organic green space management. City Council should restore its commitment to make Toronto parks safe for children.

Source: Janet May, Pesticides Campaigner, Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA). Undated article from Canadians Against Pesticides website <http://www.caps.20m.com/janeted.htm>.