

Perpetuation of “Sound vs. Junk” Science in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Here are four December 2009 Letters to the Editor (LTE) from the St. John's Telegram on the “sound vs. junk” science debate perpetuated by the chemical landscaping industry against pesticide regulation.

Three sources say there is ample scientific proof of the risks posed by pesticides and a ban should be passed by the City of John's and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

These opinions are from a City of St. John's Councillor, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) and an honorary Canadian observer on the U.S. Pesticide Working Group.

The fourth source says that pesticide bans are a result of political pressure and lack “sound” scientific proof. This opinion is from Landscape Newfoundland and Labrador (LNL).

1. “Pests and pesticides.” LTE Dec 19, 2009.

Sheilagh O'Leary, Councillor, City of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

“In response to the recent comments by Don Barry regarding the cosmetic ban of pesticides in St. John's (“Pesticide claims lack scientific backing,” Dec. 14), I would like the opportunity to voice my concerns.

First of all, Ontario's ban of cosmetic pesticides is a good example of how pesticides can be regulated. It is not a blanket ban, but instead a detailed listing of which products can and cannot be used, and under which circumstances.

Alberta is not a province anyone is going to hold up as an example of how we should be managing our environment. Ask anyone in Copenhagen.

Where lawn companies are concerned, there are such great opportunities for lawn care business in a market where safe alternatives are offered. The public is cognizant of the potential health risks underlying the use of cosmetic pesticides. People who are interested in maintaining manicured lawns would be eager to be consumers of an alternative product line that has no health risks and it is up to the professional business owner, like Mr. Barry, to provide just that.

Landscapers not seizing initiative.

As I delve deeper, I am amazed that Landscape Newfoundland and Labrador is not doing more to address this issue on the heels of recent initiatives to work towards a greener city and providing healthier exterior environments. Throwing our hands up and saying that because it is available on the shelves does not remove the responsibility from professionals in this field. Landscaping businesses should be showing leadership.

Defenders of the status quo fall back on Health Canada but Health Canada does not promote the use of pesticides. It tries to discourage people from using them and to use preventive non-toxic methods as the first resort. Take, for example, the chinch bug. If you go to the Health Canada website and go to chinch bug, three-quarters of the information is about how to prevent the infestation by not resorting to pesticides. The other third tells you how to apply pesticides and how to prevent poisoning.

Why do you need to wash your hands, not inhale, vacate your property and not allow

pets on the property after spraying if these products are so called “plant health care products,” as Mr. Barry calls them.

Health Canada does not do any research on pharmaceuticals, or chemicals. It reviews the research provided by the chemical company. It is later independent research that puts the searchlight on the inadequacies of the research submitted to Health Canada. and it these independent studies that are the best science.

Most of these “plant health care products” interfere with DNA, the basis of our very existence. Mutations in plant DNA by pesticides kills them. Mutations in DNA is the genetic basis of all acquired cancers. I don’t think you need to be a doctor or scientist to appreciate the potential negative effects of these agents.

I am not a health professional, however many will be writing soon. But, I am a concerned mother that does not support the use of cosmetic pesticides in our city.

I am also a determined city councillor who does not support the use of cosmetic pesticides and I will lobby as long as it takes until this issue gets addressed.

We have the support of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and will continue to lobby the provincial government until we see some action on this issue. I believe it is better to be safe with our families’ health and well-being beforehand, rather than be sorry later.

This is a risk I am not willing to take.”

2. “Plenty of science on pesticide risks.” LTE Dec 18, 2009.

Gideon Forman, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment.

”Concerning the letter “Pesticide claims lack scientific backing,” of Dec. 14.

In fact, there's a great deal of science showing connections between pesticide exposure and serious illness.

To pick just one study: a paper published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal Paediatrics and Child Health (April 2006) examined the common herbicide 2, 4-D.

The authors - a group of doctors and a hospital researcher - concluded that 2, 4-D can be persuasively linked to cancers, neurological impairment and reproductive problems.

With so many non-toxic lawn care alternatives now available, it makes no sense to risk medical tragedies simply to change a property's appearance.

Newfoundland and Labrador should ban non-essential pesticides at the earliest possible date.”

3. “Pesticide claims lack scientific backing.” LTE Dec 14, 2009.

Don Barry, Spokesman, Landscape Newfoundland and Labrador.

“I am responding to K. Jean Cottam’s letter published in the Dec. 8 edition of The Telegram (“Councillor has it backwards”).

St. John's Coun. Wally Collins hit the nail on the head when he spoke at a St. John's City Council meeting recently. He is absolutely correct when he says that the ban on the use by professionals of federally registered plant health products is a result of political pressure and not based upon science. A central problem is that these same products are readily available off the shelf to home owners with no training in proper use, safety or application.

The city of Calgary has just rejected a ban as being unenforceable and lacking in science.

If Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and the cities of Mount Pearl and St. John's push for a ban, let's be clear: the science does not support it. Health Canada has approved these products for use. They are the experts and they must be the reference point for decisions, where health is used as a justification.

The junk science that is being used by those groups who would like to restrict these products from use by trained professionals cannot be treated as equal to our Health Canada doctors, toxicologists and researchers. Our federal government does not have a program to kill off the population — contrary to what some in the media and vested interest organizations may want you to believe.

Landscape Newfoundland and Labrador (LNL) fully supports the controlled use of plant health-care products tested, approved and registered for commercial use by Health Canada, and applied by trained and licensed professionals to control damaging and invasive plants, pests and diseases. LNL fully supports the concept of sound horticultural practices as the first line of defence against diseases and pests, as well as integrated pest management (IPM) programs.

Members of LNL, therefore, view the use of any registered plant health-care product as only one of a number of agronomic actions that support the health of our landscapes and protect their clients' investment in landscapes and plant materials.

By the way, Kazimiera Jean Cottam has written letters to almost every newspaper in Canada to express her very uneducated opinion regarding federally registered plant health products.

Meanwhile, she has no recognized expertise, training or background in matters concerning the manufacture, use and toxicological properties of any of these products."

4. "Re 'Council OK's motion to lobby for pesticide ban,' by Deana Stokes Sullivan (The Telegram, Nov. 24)". LTE Dec 8, 2009.

K. Jean Cottam, PhD. Ottawa.

"I am honorary Canadian observer on the U.S. Pesticide Working Group.

We note that "St. John's city council passed a motion Monday night from its public works and environment committee to ask the province to ban the cosmetic use of pesticides."

Unfortunately, "there was one dissenting voice in the council chambers."

Coun. Wally Collins suggested that cosmetic pesticide bans in other provinces were the result of political pressure.

This is sheer misinformation. I beg to strongly differ.

Canadian cosmetic pesticide bans were the result of the findings of independent science, which had to overcome the pressure exerted by self interested industry lobbyists, who claim that pesticides are safe as long as they are "properly" applied and the quantities are moderate.

This is mere industry propaganda, to which, unfortunately, some city councillors tend to succumb. Training to apply pesticides "properly" protects only the applicator, and chemicals can be harmful even when applied in minute quantities.

As for drinking substances applied to the lawn, this would be utterly reckless and foolish just to prove one's point.

During my recent vacation in Costa Rica, I met a relatively young American woman whose husband had been a pesticide applicator. She told me he once tasted herbicide 2, 4-D to demonstrate that it was safe.

When we asked her how he was doing, she replied with utmost contempt that he has been long dead and buried!

We all know non-organic farmers who so far have not succumbed to cancer. This doesn't mean a thing. And what about these farmers' wives who are likely to develop breast cancer, according to a number of studies? In light of all of the above, Coun. Collins has a lot to learn.

Incidentally, Quebec and Ontario bans provide exemptions for true infestations with noxious weeds and, in some cases, allow applying insecticides (e.g. forestry in Ontario). Municipalities which have cosmetic pesticide bylaws outside these provinces also make reasonable exemptions where warranted."

Source : The St. John's Telegram, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. www.thetelegram.com