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Pesticides Return to the Forefront
By Liz Smith, NB Lung Association and NBEN Representative to the New Brunswick Pesticide Working Group

The New Brunswick Pesticide Working Group (NBPWG) provides a forum for discussion among stakeholder groups. This occasionally results in recommendations that are communicated to the Minister of the Environment indicating whether or not there has been a consensus reached among the members.

Here are some conclusions I have come to after working with various stakeholders on the NBPWG:

New Brunswickers could very well be ready for provincial legislation to ban the use of cosmetic pesticides, and as such we should push for that so that there is a level playing field for all. The present Minister of Health has promised to table legislation to reduce the use of cosmetic pesticides and will do so either by legislation enabling municipalities to do so, or at the provincial level. Therefore the time is ripe to put pressure on our MLA's and publicise the issue.

Although many companies and members of the public will change their methods of plant care through education, there are always people who will not do the "right thing" until there is a law which demands it - a stop light, so to speak. Therefore, in my opinion, the best case scenario would be a provincial law banning the use of pesticides for lawn care in New Brunswick. Naturally, if municipalities are able to create bylaws within their boundaries, this is a good first step. However, not all municipalities will do so, and there are many lawns outside municipal boundaries.

From my experience with the leaders of the landscape industry in New Brunswick, I have concluded that they are acting in good faith in trying to educate all of their members in responsible turf care. They too have been frustrated by those who do not think it is possible to have vibrant, attractive green spaces without the use of pesticides. Whether or not we manage to put up "stop lights" at the municipal or provincial level for those very companies and members of the public who reject acting in an environmentally responsible manner, everyone will benefit from having landscape and lawn care companies that are educated in best horticultural practices.

Please read about initiatives at various levels of government and the landscape industry below:

Federal Level:

The New Pest Control Products Act was introduced in June, 2006. Highlights of the act include a reconsideration of registration decisions if anyone files a notice of objection, a strengthening of the post-registration controls on pesticides, and that sales information must now be collected and reported.

As of 2006, chlorpyrifos and diazinon have been removed from the market. Azinphos-methyl will be removed from the market in 2012.

There is a proposed classification system for domestic pesticides, which would divide pesticides into categories of self-select (ready to use) and controlled purchase (concentrate or quantity-limited packaging) for which customers would have to have a prescription and additional education to use. If the new system is adopted, provincial governments would have to take care of sale, storage, and training regulations.

Provincial Level:

As of 2007, all landscape pesticide applicators have had to be recertified using updated study manuals and examinations that include good plant health care practices (IPM). However, the use of good plant health care practices is not obligatory under provincial regulations. Pesticide applicator recertification is expected to be implemented in the structural, forestry, and industrial sectors in 2008 and 2009.

The biggest initiative by the provincial government will be the introduction of a bill to give municipalities the right to restrict the use of cosmetic pesticides within their boundaries. Note: As of December, 2007, the provincial government has not yet decided whether it will proceed with enabling legislation at the municipal level or with provincial legislation.

Municipal Level:

City of Moncton: Bylaw requiring topsoil for all commercial, industrial, and residential landscaping projects to be a minimum of six inches in depth. This will promote healthy, pest-resistant turf without the perceived need for water or chemical inputs.

Cities of New Brunswick Association and the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick: Made the following resolutions, both of which were encouraged by Landscape New Brunswick:

1. For the provincial government to incorporate IPM accreditation into the NB Landscape Pesticide Use permit application process. I did not endorse this resolution.
2. To urge the province to ban the sale and use of combined fertilizer-herbicide products. I endorsed this resolution.

Landscape New Brunswick:

At the most recent meeting of the Pesticides Working Group, a Landscape New Brunswick (LNB) representative updated the group on the progress of IPM/PHC (Plant Health Care) accreditation in the Atlantic provinces. He reported that half of the members of LNB have requested that IPM accreditation be mandatory for all landscape applicators in New Brunswick. So far, about one third of the applicators have begun the accreditation process that will eventually involve a third party audit of both office and field operations. He also stated that operators would have to begin by cutting their pesticide use by one half.

This is a good step forward to raise standards of practice and will stand in good stead those who make a living from turf care if we are successful with a ban. However, in the meantime:

Landscapers need to come up with a new term and focus for "best practices" in land care and a definition that makes it abundantly clear that these practices will be sustainable in terms of health, the environment, and their livelihoods.

The certification process, besides being by a third party and transparent, must include measurable indicators of success.

According to LNB's conclusions from the Statistics Canada pesticide usage survey results, New Brunswick has shown the second biggest reduction in pesticide use in the country (second to Quebec, which has provincial laws restricting the use of cosmetic pesticides).