

Attitudes Toward Lawn Care in Toronto

City Council has asked whether we should reduce our use of pesticides. This section of the document provides information about how people are using lawn pesticides in Toronto.

There are no exact figures available regarding how much and what types of pesticides are used on lawns and gardens in Toronto. However, we do have data from three sources: a recent poll of consumer attitudes toward pest control products done by *Ipsos-Reid* on behalf of a number of pesticide manufacturers; a Toronto Public Health survey of Toronto residents' use of pest control products; and, input from stakeholders at a City of Toronto workshop held on January 23, 2002. We also have information, from a poll conducted for the Toronto Environmental Alliance, about the attitudes of Ontario residents on the use of lawn care pesticides.

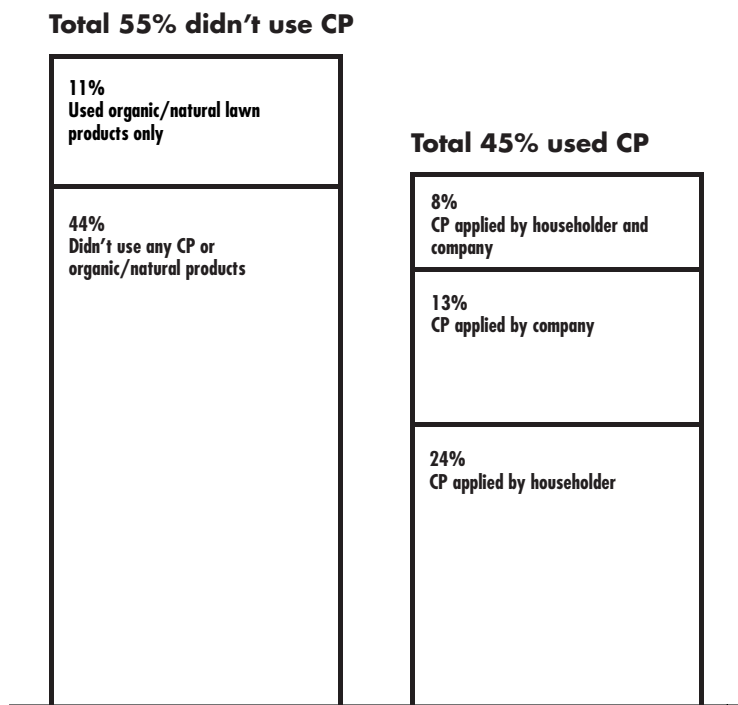
Consumer attitudes to pesticides

This *Ipsos-Reid* 2001 poll was commissioned by three companies that manufacture pesticides, and a chemical products manufacturer's association. They surveyed 600 Canadian homeowners (excluding those in condominium apartments) on their opinions about indoor and outdoor use pesticides. The analysis of the poll noted, "Canadian homeowners are of two minds about their use of pest and weed control products.... On the one hand, [homeowners] see merit in the products' purpose and see the products as effective ... on the other hand, homeowners also see disadvantages or potential risks to using these products." ⁶ The survey notes that the greatest proportion of homeowners prefer to "do it themselves," with 77% of respondents saying they would remove pests in their lawns and/or gardens either by hand (28%) or with suitable products they purchased themselves (49%). Thirteen per cent (13%) responded that they would hire a professional.

Survey of Toronto households

This survey conducted in 2001 by Toronto Public Health obtained responses from 341 households with lawns in Toronto. Responses to the Toronto survey disclosed that more than half (55%) of the lawns had no application of chemical pesticides in the two years preceding January 2001. Twenty-four per cent (24%) of households responded that they applied chemical pesticides to their lawns themselves, 13% had professionals apply chemical pesticides to their lawns, and 8% of the households used both methods.

The responses to the two polls suggest that any restrictions on the use of lawn and garden pesticides would have their greatest impact on householders who currently purchase and apply pest control products themselves.



Source: Outdoor pesticide telephone survey, Toronto Public Health, 2001

Percentage of households using chemical pesticides (CP) or organic products on their lawns, Toronto 2001

Stakeholder input on attitudes toward lawns

The benefits of green space

People use pesticides because they believe they improve the look of their properties. The industry poll described earlier in this document notes “these products further the pride [people] take in their gardening efforts (and their home) by improving the appearance and health of the lawn.”⁷

At a City of Toronto stakeholder workshop on Toronto’s proposed strategy to achieve a phase-out of non-essential outdoor use of pesticides, those in attendance agreed that beautiful green spaces in the urban environment are beneficial in many respects. Green spaces are aesthetically pleasing, provide natural cooling in the urban **heat island**, retain topsoil, prevent run-off of sediment and pollutants into surface water and provide pleasant recreational opportunities on private and public lands.

A range of opinion of how to keep green spaces beautiful (and What is a beautiful green space)



A wide range of stakeholder opinion emerged at the workshop around the question of how beneficial green spaces are best kept green and healthy.

Some stakeholders suggested that in order to keep a lawn in a healthy weed-free, insect-free condition, the best means was the appropriate use of chemical pest control products.

Some stakeholders suggested that healthy lawns and gardens maintained with chemical-pesticide-free horticultural methods are naturally more resistant to weed and insect infestations and any pests can be managed with non-chemical means.

Some stakeholders suggested that people should adjust their expectations about what makes a beautiful property and create green spaces less reliant on chemical products to resist damaging pests and unwelcome weeds.

Some stakeholders suggested that **Integrated Pest Management** (which includes pesticides as one tool among a broad range of horticultural techniques) is the best means to maintain a beautiful lawn with limited use of pesticides.

Some stakeholders suggested that **Integrated Plant Health Care** is a better method to maintain healthy green spaces. Integrated Plant Health Care considers the use of chemical pesticides, not so much as a “tool in the toolbox” but as an absolute last resort when all other methods have failed.

With just this short list of some of the opinions expressed at the stakeholder workshop, it is clear that there are a variety of ideas about both green spaces and the ways to keep them healthy.

Even with the very broad range of opinion expressed at the stakeholder workshop on January 23, 2002, most of the participants did agree that people could be educated to reduce their use of pesticides.

What do the federal and provincial governments say about lawn care?

Health Canada and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) are the federal Ministry and agency chiefly responsible for pest control product regulation in Canada. All provincial governments also have laws regulating pesticide use (see the section in this document on pesticide law and policy for more information).

The federal government supports the notion that people should reduce their pesticide use at home as much as they can. The PMRA has put some resources toward a Healthy Lawn Strategy for Urban Use Pesticides. The objective of the strategy is “to reduce reliance on pesticides used for lawn care through the application of Integrated Pest Management principles, with particular emphasis on pest prevention, use of reduced risk products and applications of pesticides only when necessary.”⁸ The Ontario Ministry of the Environment participates in this federal program.⁹

What’s the word on pesticide use?

It appears that many of Toronto households with lawns have already chosen not to use chemical pesticides. Most stakeholders at the January workshop believe that pesticide use can be reduced, but other stakeholders do not think reductions are necessary. Both the federal and provincial governments also support the idea that people can reduce their use of pesticides and still maintain beautiful properties. When asked by Toronto Public Health, about two-thirds of the poll respondents supported restricting the use of lawn and garden pesticides. The Toronto Environmental Alliance, conducting an Ontario-wide poll of public opinion (October 2001), including people who do not have lawns, found that 82% supported “a by-law restricting the use of cosmetic pesticides on private residential property.”¹⁰

What do you think? Do you use pesticides on your lawn and garden? Are there ways you could reduce your pesticide use?

The City of Toronto has information about how to reduce your use of pesticides. Call the Lawn Improvement Helpline at 416-397-5296.

The federal and provincial governments support reducing lawn and garden pesticide use.
