

## Introduction

### What is this document about?

Toronto City Council is considering whether it should restrict the “non-essential” use of lawn and garden pesticides on private property. Council asked Toronto Public Health to prepare this document to facilitate and encourage public discussions on the development of an appropriate strategy including considering the possible nature and scope of a by-law.

*Playing it Safe: Healthy Choices about Lawn Care Pesticides* provides up-to-date information about:

- public attitudes about, and alternative approaches to, lawn care;
- currently available research on pesticides and their effects on health and the environment;
- municipal by-laws and other regulatory tools that could be used to control or curb the use of pesticides.

### What are pesticides?

The focus of this discussion document is on lawn care **pesticides\***, manufactured chemical products that are applied to lawns and gardens to kill weeds, bugs, fungus and other unwanted living things. The federal regulator, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), identifies the following active ingredients as those most commonly used on Canadian lawns: the **insecticides** diazinon, carbaryl, and malathion and the **herbicides** 2,4-D, mecoprop, dicamba and MCPA. Unless we note otherwise, the reader may assume that the discussion applies primarily to these chemical compounds.

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***Pesticides kill weeds, bugs, fungus and other unwanted living things.***

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### What is a “cosmetic” or “non-essential” use of pesticides?

The use of pesticides to keep lawns free of pests is often referred to as a “cosmetic” or “non-essential” use. The question of what is a “non-essential” use is controversial, and we will not be able to resolve the controversy in this document. We can provide a few examples of what others have suggested. The PMRA suggests that a “non-essential” use may be one where pesticides are sprayed as part of a lawn care program when there are no pests or infestations apparent on the lawn.<sup>1</sup> The World Wildlife Fund suggests that any use of chemical pesticides on

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\***Bolded terms can be found in the Glossary.**

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lawns and gardens is “non-essential”.<sup>2</sup> A third suggestion is that a “non-essential” pesticide use is one where there is an alternative method or product, which makes the use of a chemical pesticide unnecessary. Finally, approximately 40 municipalities in Canada (most in Quebec, and one in Nova Scotia) have by-laws that set out permitted uses for pest control products (such as in public pools) and the conditions under which they may be used. It could be said that these by-laws identify “non-essential” uses by excluding them from the list of permitted uses.

### **What is Toronto doing about pesticides?**

In response to concerns expressed over the use of pesticides, Toronto Public Health released *Pesticides: A Public Health Perspective*, in October 1998.<sup>3</sup> Toronto City Council then made a commitment to phase out the use of pesticides on public green spaces. By the end of 1999, the first year of the program, Toronto had reduced its pesticide use on parks and city green spaces (excluding City golf courses, production greenhouses and road corridors) by over 97% and has maintained these reductions in subsequent years.<sup>4</sup>

Toronto’s reduced pesticide use is part of a larger vision. In its Environmental Plan<sup>5</sup>, Toronto City Council envisions a city that enjoys a robust economy, a vibrant society and a healthy environment - including clean air, clean water and a thriving ecosystem. Avoiding the use of pesticides within the city is also a part of that vision. Council is now considering whether it should further control pesticide use in the City, and reduce their use on lawns and gardens.

### **How can you get involved in the pesticide issue?**

City Council has asked Toronto Public Health to consult broadly with the public on the question of further controls on the use of pesticides within the City. We need your answers to the questions: should Toronto seek further pesticide use reductions and, if so, how?

Toronto Public Health has produced *Playing it Safe* to provide Toronto residents with information about pesticides: how they are used in the City, what may be the health effects associated with their use and what may be the policy options available to achieve a reduction in pesticide use.

We encourage you to get involved in the debate over the future of pesticide use in the City.

City Council has asked Toronto Public Health to hold public meetings so that Council may make decisions about restricting pesticide use based on your informed input, concerns and advice. You can find out more about these meetings by calling 416-338-1215.



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As you read this document, consider these questions:

- Do you think it is a good idea to reduce or even eliminate the use of lawn and garden pesticides on private property?
- How can residents be encouraged to reduce their use of lawn and garden pesticides?
- Should a by-law be developed to restrict pesticide use on lawns and gardens?

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***Pesticide use in Toronto  
what's your opinion?***

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