

## **A Message from Toronto's Medical Officer of Health**

Achieving environmental sustainability is possible if we use our natural resources wisely and ensure that human activities do not degrade the environment or endanger our health. Phasing out chemical pesticide use, wherever possible, is an important way in which we can reduce the risks to human health from toxic substances in our environment.

The use of lawn care pesticides is a public health issue of growing concern in Toronto. Scientific studies have found lawn care pesticide residues at levels that may be affecting our aquatic ecosystem. And since pesticides are mobile in the environment, people cannot avoid coming into contact with them. Of particular concern is the fact that children can be exposed to a variety of pesticides that are commonly used in and around the home.

The long-term effects on human health from continuous exposure to low levels of chemical pesticides is a subject of ongoing debate. Many scientific studies indicate significant and serious health concerns, while some others do not. Nonetheless, there is growing evidence that human health can be put at risk from pesticide use. And when risks to human health are unnecessary or uncertain, the wisest course of action is to substitute safer alternatives and methods, rather than incurring risks that may prove unacceptable in the long run.

Many Toronto residents have already demonstrated that beautiful, healthy lawns and gardens can be maintained by switching to non-chemical methods. Businesses now have significant opportunities to offer goods and services to meet the needs of this growing market. Local government can help with approaches that range from public education to municipal regulation of pesticide use, all of which should be fully reviewed and publicly debated.

The City of Toronto's consultation process provides an opportunity for everyone concerned about this issue to contribute to a strategy that will lead us to a healthy and sustainable future. I look forward to your ideas and appreciate your participation.



Dr. Sheela V. Basrur  
Medical Officer of Health

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