



RNAO

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

December 19, 2006

His Worship Mayor Rob Burton and Oakville Councillors
Town of Oakville
P.O. Box 310
1225 Trafalgar Road
Oakville, ON
L6J 5A6

Dear Mayor Burton and members of Oakville Town Council,

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario is the professional association of registered nurses in Ontario. In speaking to our mandate to promote healthy public policy, RNAO fully supports bylaws aimed at phasing out the use of pesticides for nonessential purposes. Citizens in Oakville are advocating for a pesticide bylaw, and we are very pleased that you are considering such a bylaw. We urge you to pass the strongest pesticide bylaw possible.

As nurses, we have substantial concerns about the use of pesticides:

1. There are many epidemiological and laboratory studies linking a range of health problems to pesticide exposure. The problems include:
 - Cancer, birth defects, reproductive damage, neurological and developmental toxicity, immunotoxicity, and endocrine disruption.^{1 2}
2. The risk to health comes not only from active ingredients, but also from so-called inert substances.^{3 4 5}
3. We are concerned that existing controls, through Canada's national pesticide regulatory system, do not adequately protect children from the special risks that pesticides pose to them:⁶
 - Children tend to get greater exposure whenever pesticides are released because of their behaviour and play;
 - The developing organs and tissues of children are more vulnerable to harm;
 - Children are even exposed to pesticides in utero, when crucial physiological development occurs; and,
 - Children have a longer time ahead of them for exposure to pesticides and to develop resulting health problems.
4. Synergistic and cumulative effects can heighten the damage due to pesticides.^{7 8}
5. Detection of pesticide damage in individuals is difficult, as physicians and other health professionals are not generally well trained in recognizing pesticide poisoning. Furthermore, the effects of pesticide damage are often only apparent after many

years. Thus, people do not receive early warning signs that would allow them to take action in time.

RNAO believes that health considerations must be paramount in this debate. The precautionary principle dictates that we insist on proof of safety, rather than waiting for proof of harm. To quote the Canadian Cancer Society, “when an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause-and-effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.”⁹ In view of the known risks, RNAO sees no justification for the cosmetic or nonessential use of pesticides, particularly when safe alternatives exist. Pesticide bylaws protect all citizens, including those who choose not to use pesticides but are exposed to pesticides used by others.

This issue is important to nurses, and we applaud Oakville Town Council for considering this significant public health measure. We urge you to pass the strongest possible bylaw controlling the nonessential use of pesticides. Polling shows strong public support for this action across the province. You can count on the support of registered nurses as you seek to build a safer and healthier environment.

With warmest regards,



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD (cand), OOnt.
Executive Director
RNAO

¹ Sanborn, Margaret, Donald Cole, Kathleen Kerr, Cathy Vakil, Luz Helena Sanin, Kate Bassil (2004), *Pesticides Literature Review*, Ontario College of Family Physicians, April 23.

² Solomon, Gina, O.A. Ogunseitan, Jan Kirsch (2000) *Pesticides and Human Health: A Resource for Health Care Professionals*, Physicians for Social Responsibility and Californians for Pesticide Reform.

³ The EPA encourages manufacturers to refer to “inert ingredients” as “other ingredients” because an inert classification does not mean non-toxic (US Environmental Protection Agency (2006), *Inert (other) Ingredients in Pesticide Products*, <http://www.epa.gov/opprd001/inerts/>, accessed June 19, 2006.)

⁴ Attorney General of New York (1996), *The Secret Hazards of Pesticides: Inert Ingredients*, February.

⁵ Journal of Pesticide Reform (1999), *Are “Inert” Ingredients in Pesticides Really Benign?*, Summer, Vol. 19, No. 2., p. 8.

⁶ Sanborn et al, p. 167.

⁷ Tuormaa, Tuula (2006), *The Adverse Effects of Agrochemicals on Reproductive Health*, Foresight, the Association for the Promotion of Preconceptual Care, accessed at http://www.foresight-preconception.org.uk/booklet_agro.htm June 19, 2006.

⁸ Steingraber, Sandra (2005), *The Precautionary Principle vs. Regulation: Are We Living in a Chemical Stew?*, Keynote address at 9th Annual Conference on Women’s Health and the Environment, October 24, accessed at http://www.hfp.heinz.org/programs/wc_2005/keynote_sandra_steingraber_2005.html, June 19, 2006.

⁹ Canadian Cancer Society (2006), *Cancer and the Environment*, December 4, accessed December 21 at http://www.cancer.ca/ccs/internet/standard/0,3182,3172_1434293210_langId-en,00.html