

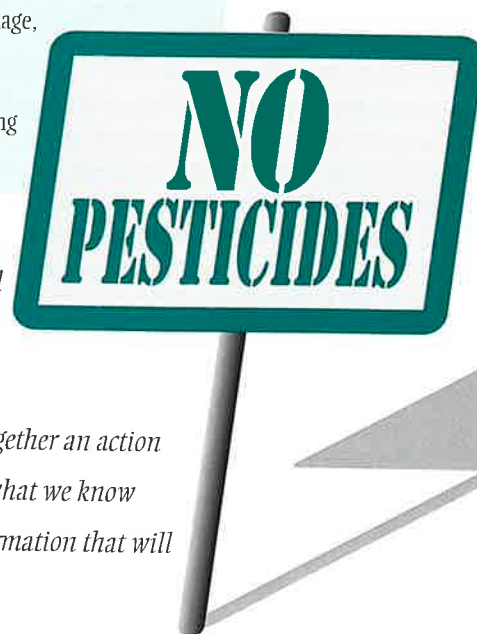
# RNAO Pesticide Action Kit aids fight against pesticides

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that RNAO support local chapter initiatives to lobby for municipal by-laws banning the cosmetic use of pesticides through the development of a resource package, and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that RNAO lobby the provincial government for provincial legislation banning the cosmetic use of pesticides.

*This resolution, sponsored by RNAO's Brant Haldimand Norfolk Chapter, was brought forward at the 2000 Annual General Meeting and accepted by the membership.*

*In response to this resolution, RNAO is putting together an action kit that will contain background information on what we know about pesticides as well as lobbying tools and information that will encourage member involvement in the issue.*



## What is the problem with pesticides?

Kim Jarvi

Pesticides are chemicals designed to kill, control, or repel insects, plant diseases, weeds, rodents, and germs<sup>1</sup>. They essentially work by killing organisms, and not only those organisms that are targeted. "Epidemiological and laboratory studies contribute to a growing body of evidence linking pesticide exposure to adverse health effects including cancer, birth defects, reproductive harm, neurological and developmental toxicity, immunotoxicity, and disruption of the endocrine system."<sup>2</sup> Accidental poisonings – which are very common – can lead to quick deaths.

The risk comes not only from active ingredients that have been subjected to testing with varying degrees of rigour (pesticides on the market longer will have been tested to a less rigorous standard), but also from so-called "inert" ingredients that are not tested. Certain segments of our population are more susceptible to the dangers of pesticides than others. For example, The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment explains why pesticide control standards that do not assess the special risk to children expose them to intolerably high levels of these dangerous chemicals:



- Children have greater risk of exposure and greater risk of harm compared to adults for reasons unique to each developmental stage. Given their behaviour and play (e.g., close to the ground, in close contact with soil, oblivious to pesticide warning signs, and tend to put their hands in their mouths) they are likely to come into contact with toxins.
- Children's developing organs and tissues are more vulnerable to harm, and their metabolic and physiological systems are unable to protect the child from toxic exposure and effects.
- Children may be exposed to pesticides in utero, through breast milk and by products, such as toys, clothing, etc.
- Children have more time ahead of them to be exposed to pesticides and develop health problems.
- Children are unable to voluntarily avoid exposure.

New research continues to find risks in pesticides that formerly were thought to be safe. In the case of non-essential use of pesticides, the precautionary principle dictates that we err on the side of caution. We should not get dragged down into a debate between epidemiologists, and we should not wait until a pesticide is proven dangerous before banning its use. If it is determined – on health or environmental grounds – that pesticide use is essential, we should use the least toxic pesticide that will do the job.

Pesticides should only be used if it can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the net effect on health is positive. "If there is a potential of harm from an activity and if there is uncertainty about the magnitude of impacts or causality, then anticipatory

action should be taken to avoid harm."<sup>3</sup> The burden of proof ought to rest with the party using the pesticides. We should not rely on the simple say-so of pesticide producers, especially since we know that some pesticides come with substantial known risks, and others come with risks not currently classifiable.

So, curbing pesticide use presents a formidable challenge. The use of urban pesticides is new – a post-War phenomenon, but it has quickly embedded itself into North American life and into our market economy. The good news, though, is that healthy alternatives are very practical.

#### Why a campaign to ban cosmetic pesticides?

The overall objective of this campaign is to promote a healthier environment by reducing the number of pesticides released into the environment. Given the risk associated with the use of pesticides and the desire to reduce their use, the campaign begins by addressing unnecessary use – uses that are not for the purpose of protecting human or environmental health.

We should be clear that there are many perceived advantages to using pesticides for cosmetic reasons. In urban and suburban Canada, the appeal is large expanses of manicured lawns. Thirty-one per cent of Canadian households are reported to use pesticides in their garden or home.<sup>4</sup> Many people like the appearance of uniform, unblemished turf. For many, it signifies attentive owners who are in control of their yards. For others, it is a status symbol indicating that they can afford to have their property sprayed and trimmed. Esthetic considerations aside, we know that many people use pesticides to maintain their investment.

There is also a lot of money at stake. Lawn spraying is big business and pesticides are an important component of the chemical industry (\$100 million per year in Canada<sup>5</sup>). The industry is very active in opposing bans or constraints on its products. Part of the approach is using its own epidemiologists and its own list of studies to promote its product. The question of what constitutes independent research is key. The editors of leading medical journals recently announced they would no longer publish articles in which scientific objectivity is in question. This decision is based on a concern that pharmaceutical companies, and to a lesser extent governments, are intervening in research programs and compromising results.<sup>6</sup>

The RNAO resolution asserts there is no justification for using these dangerous chemicals for non-essential purposes. Other organizations have taken alternative action as well. Toronto Parks and Recreation, for instance, has clearly demonstrated that different approaches to turf and ground cover can achieve a very good effect. In fact, Toronto Parks and Recreation was able to reduce its use of pesticides by 97 per cent in 1999.

#### What can RNs do?

At the national level, a private member's bill (Bill C-267, by Quebec Liberal MP Marlene Jennings) calls for a ban on the use of pesticides for non-essential purposes. Nurses can speak, write, and e-mail their MPs, asking them to promote the bill. When contacting Liberal MPs, members could remind them of the Liberal Party's resolution (#113, March 19, 2000) calling for a ban on the non-essential use of pesticides. At the same time, pressure can be put on the government members to fully accept

*Continued on page 16*

#### References:

1. National Resource Defence Council (1997). Toxic Chemicals & Health: Kids' Health-In-Depth Report Our Children At Risk - The 5 Worst Environmental Threats To Their Health. November.
2. Ibid.
3. Raffensperger, C. and J. Tickner (eds.) (1999), Protecting Public Health and the Environment: Implementing the Precautionary Principle (Washington DC, Island Press, Introduction, p. 1.
4. Jones, Tim, "Ontario Mayor considers Pesticide Ban," *Canadians Against pesticides*, <http://www.caps.20m.com/aurora.htm>
5. Ibid.
6. Picard, A. Medical journals set stricter rules for studies. (2001, September 10). *The Globe & Mail*, p.A1.

## RNAO Pesticide Action Kit helps anti-pesticide campaign grow



Continued from page 15

the May 16, 2000 pesticide control recommendations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development (they have thus far failed to do so).

At the provincial level, RNAO's lobby kit will provide tools that members can use to push the Ontario government to adopt Quebec's approach. Thus far, the Quebec government is the only provincial jurisdiction that has spoken of making a move to ban the non-essential use of pesticides.

At the municipal level, there has been a tremendous level of activity. This summer, the Supreme Court ruled that Hudson, Quebec's law controlling non-essential use of pesticides was constitutional. Following the town of Hudson's attempt to ban the non-

essential use of pesticides, two companies challenged the ban in court. The town finally won its case in spite of the fact that the pesticide spraying companies kept taking the case to higher courts. This decision has opened the floodgates, as municipalities across the country move quickly to implement their own pesticide control legislation. More than 20 cities and towns in Ontario are currently working on their own by-laws.

Remember that bans are part of an overall strategy. They are not cure-alls, and they come with risks. In municipalities where bans are in place, some people continue to use pesticides on the sly, or under exemptions. Part of our campaign will be acknowledgement of the need for

jurisdictions to resort to pesticides, if:

- There is a proven risk due to the "pest."
- There are no safer alternatives.
- The health gain from the pesticide solution is greater than the loss due to pesticide risk.

The RNAO Pesticide Action Kit will include many tools that can be used to lobby all levels of government. One inclusion will be model legislation relevant to Ontario municipalities and a description of current collaborative efforts to legislatively control pesticides.

For those of you who are keen to be more involved in this issue, stay tuned for the completion of this political action tool!

*Kim Jarvi is RNAO's senior economist.*

THAT'S A  
GOOD  
IDEA!



Kimberley Kearsey

## Internship program boosts new grads confidence, competence

New nursing graduates beginning work at St. Michael's Hospital this year are the first to take advantage of a unique opportunity to develop both experience and confidence in clinical and technical skills within their chosen practice area.

The Louis Odette Nurse Internship Program, established in April 2000, accepted 15 participants to take part in the 16-week mentorship program that will help them to balance personal and professional growth as they embark on their nursing career. "A lot of decisions lie with the nurses," Cynthia Ma, a recent graduate and RN in the program since mid-June, says. "I hope to be more comfortable with everything when I'm done (the program)." Ma has selected labour and delivery as her area of specialty. "Four

months (of mentoring) is really valuable," she says. "It gives you more time to practice and develop better assessment skills."

Laura Jackson, a graduate from Ryerson's Nursing Program, also joined St. Michael's staff and the program in June. "Everyone is very supportive," she says of the mentors she has met in the mental health program, where she has decided to focus her attention. "I'm lucky to have something like this straight out of school. It gives a new graduate extra support and I get to see the different aspects of the mental health program. It makes the transition easier."

In today's health-care environment, new graduates have precious time to adjust, prioritize, manage and learn all of the practical skills that are so

important to easing into life as a nurse.

"St. Michael's Hospital is committed to supporting nurses as they begin their professional development," Patricia Petryshen, chief nursing officer, says. "Our internship program creates a unique opportunity for knowledge acquisition by new nurses and knowledge transfer by expert nurses."

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