

The Mother Of Canada's Pesticide Bans Leaves Mixed Legacy



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Dr. June Irwin, a practicing dermatologist who tended a 79-acre farm populated with chickens, sheep and geese, died this past June 22 at the age of 83. Irwin is more famous (notorious in some circles) for other reasons, of course.

She was the individual in Hudson in Quebec Province, that sparked the movement that eventually led to the banning of practically all commonly-used lawn care chemicals in much of Canada.

Irwin, beginning in the 1980s, campaigned relentlessly – writing letters, contacting newspapers and appearing at government hearings – warning of the health dangers associated with lawn care pesticides.

Mostly at her urging, in 1991 Hudson passed a bylaw banning residential pesticides. The action by this community of 3,000 people located just west of Montreal turned out to have far-reaching consequences. It was the spark that dramatically changed the chemical lawn care industry in much of Canada.

And this in spite of efforts by the lawn care industry, supported by product manufacturers, to squelch it before it spread.

In 1993, two lawn care companies, ChemLawn and Spray Tech Lawn Care sued Hudson to strike down the bylaw. But it wasn't until December 2000 that the case reached the Supreme Court and that following June they voted unanimously to uphold Hudson's bylaw.

By that time, more than 35 other Quebec municipalities had passed similar bylaws. The anti-lawn care movement got another huge boost in 2008 when the Province of Ontario, by far the most populous region in Canada, prohibited 80 lawn care chemicals and 300 products that experts say pose a potential health risk.

Since then other communities in Canada have debated the health effects of lawn care chemicals – some municipalities instituting bans even in the face of studies showing the safety of commonly used products such as 2,4-D.

Although confining herself mostly to her practice and her farm, June Irwin nevertheless became an environmental hero thanks a 70-minute documentary video named “A Chemical Reaction,” that chronicled her efforts by [organic lawn care activist, author, filmmaker, etc. Paul Tukey](#).

News of Irwin’s passing unleashed a barrage of articles and commentaries lauding her efforts on behalf of the environment and health of Canada’s citizens.

This comes in spite of solid evidence based on study after study that the products outlawed in much of Canada do not present an unacceptable risk to the environment or humans. Many of these same products are still commonly used on golf courses and on farmland while they are outlawed for lawn care.

Also lost in the praise for Dr. Irwin, although undeniably sincere and passionate in her beliefs, is the harm resulting from her efforts to the Canadian lawn care industry in terms of size, revenues and jobs.

Add to that the increased costs and labor needed to maintain attractive parks and sports fields, not to mention residential and commercial lawns and landscapes, and it’s not difficult to understand why not everybody is enamored with her legacy.

Read more:

- [Is the Anti-Lawn Care Bill Workable?](#)
- [Anti-Lawn Care Ban in Maryland Leaves Industry Seeking Answers](#)
- [Montgomery County Approves Restrictions on Use of Lawn Pesticides](#)
- [Pesticide Bans in Canada](#)