

## Dog Owners Reduce Pesticide Use to Support the Healthy Paws Initiative

A growing number of people with outdoor pets are concerned about the impact of toxic substances, such as pesticides, on the health of their pets, themselves and the local ecosystem.

Outdoor pets are vulnerable to lawn chemicals because they breathe closer to the ground, are small in size, lick their paws and coat, and are more likely to roll around in, crawl on, or even eat the grass that's been treated with pesticides. Pet owners and children may also be exposed to pesticides when they handle their pets.

The City of Toronto is among more than 60 municipalities in Canada that have a pesticide by-law to limit the cosmetic (non-essential) use of residential pesticides. A critical step in ensuring compliance with pesticide by-laws is to educate residents on how to solve their pest problems without using the banned pesticides.

This spring, the Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention (C2P2) launched the *Healthy Paws Initiative*, an educational outreach campaign, with the support of the Environmental Protection Office of Toronto Public Health. Rich Whate, Health Promotion Consultant with the Environmental Protection Office of Toronto Public Health explains, "Having community organizations use unique strategies such as the Healthy Paws Initiative helps reach a wide variety of Toronto residents. Increasing awareness of the Pesticide By-Law and encouraging residents to make changes that will help protect the environment is good for animal and human health."



C2P2 is coordinating outreach efforts at local dog parks in the communities of Etobicoke, Downsview, North York, and Scarborough to target dog owners directly. Volunteers are encouraging dog owners to reduce pesticide use by informing them about the benefits to dog and human health and the environment of reducing pesticide use on their lawns and gardens, providing natural gardening tips, and offering information about the City of Toronto's pesticide by-law.

"The outreach efforts were specially designed using community-based social marketing techniques" explains Kady Cowan, Coordinator of the *Healthy Paws Initiative*. Reflecting on the benefits of this approach, Cowan explains "Techniques such as prompts or reminders and making natural gardening activities normal aid in achieving the behavioural changes required to reduce pesticide use, which is good for dog, human and ecosystem health, and supports the Toronto pesticide by-law."

Many residents are thrilled with the results of natural gardening and are eager to protect their pets' health. Carol Coiffe, Healthy Community Advisor with the Fairlawn Neighbourhood Centre in Toronto supports the need to pass on this message to neighbours, friends and local veterinarians. "I encourage animal lovers to share the information and guidance provided by the Healthy Paws Initiative with others - to sustain the momentum of change". Together we can limit unnecessary exposure to pesticides.

C2P2 is also looking for support from local veterinarians and other professionals working with dogs to help educate pet owners on the health benefits of reducing their pet's exposure to lawn chemicals. Opportunities to get involved include: distributing outreach materials to clients and promoting the messages of the Healthy Paws initiative within client newsletters.

For more details on this initiative contact Kady Cowan by e-mail at [kady@c2p2online.com](mailto:kady@c2p2online.com) or toll free at 1-800-667-9790.