

Media Statement
After Green-lighting Chlorpyrifos in December,
Health Canada Finally Plans to Put Brain-Wasting Pesticide Out to Pasture
(delaying action for years, following rulings in EU, and US Federal Court of Appeals)

TORONTO/OTTAWA (EMBARGOED UNTIL 6 a.m. May 17, 2021)—A network of health and environmental groups applaud Health Canada’s Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) for finally moving to ban the toxic insecticide Chlorpyrifos, 53 years after it was first approved for use in Canada. The Agency quietly issued a [three-year plan to ban](#) late last week.

In December 2020, the PMRA extended some uses for several years, following its first full environmental review since entering the Canadian marketplace in 1969. Absent, however, was the mandatory health impact assessment. The PMRA finally issued a staged ban—allowing use for use in three more growing seasons—when it became clear that registrant-company health data was not forthcoming.

Canada’s slow phase-out risks ongoing harm as well as dumping of Chlorpyrifos. In April 2019, the European Food Safety Authority ruled that safety of Chlorpyrifos could not be established, and a continent-wide ban came into force on [all foods traded in Europe last October](#). In April 2021, a [US Federal Court of Appeals panel ordered the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) to either ban it or set safer (lower) limits on its use to protect the environment and public health. In December 2020, the EPA proposed to extend its regulatory approval for another 15 years, but when the Biden Administration took office, it extended the public comment period for 30 days.

[Chlorpyrifos was phased out for household use](#) two decades ago, and the world’s [largest manufacturer Corteva \(formed from the merger of Dupont and Dow Chemical\) announced that it would cease production 15 months ago](#).

Public health advocates cite reams of science in the public domain establishing that Chlorpyrifos and related chemicals damage brains, harm development and cause chronic disease, but, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency has a pattern of generally disregarding studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Instead, it relies almost exclusively on tens of thousands of pages of data and internal studies provided by applicant chemical companies. The public may *view* redacted versions of this raw data (i.e., with confidential business information blacked out by PMRA), but only if they also swear an affidavit promising confidentially and sign a non-disclosure agreement, enforced by the threat of criminal penalties. In an Ottawa Reading Room, they surrender all electronic devices, view unsearchable files on a PMRA computer, and take hand-written notes that are photo-copied before leaving. The public cannot even view the PMRA summaries and analyses of this voluminous data. “Canada has two scientific solitudes, with the PMRA versus the medical, public health and environmental advocates. They reach different conclusions based upon different evidence,” states environmental health scientist Meg Sears of *Prevent Cancer Now*.

The Canadian policy and advocacy group [Safe Food Matters Inc. \(SFM\)](#) led a network of 10 public interest groups in a formal Notice of Objection to the PMRA’s December 2020 Environmental Impact Assessment approving ongoing use of Chlorpyrifos. SFM’s President Mary Lou McDonald, an environmental lawyer, commented “PMRA’s environmental risk assessment on the chemical did not use proper methods of science, and PMRA was late to the party in seeing the dangerous health effects. This

is not protecting Canadians from the risks of pesticides. Health Canada needs its own and better resources to properly assess risks, instead of relying on the assumptions and science fed to it by corporations and then relying on NGOs to tell them where they are wrong. The current system isn't working.”

The [Centre for Health Science and Law](#) and [Prevent Cancer Now](#) objected to failure to include the health impact assessment which is required by Parliament pursuant to the *Pest Control Products Act*. CHSL filed comments with the U.S. EPA and a public consultation of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Toxics on transparency. “Instead of acting on the basis that thousands of studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals were ringing alarm bells about the dangers to children’s brain development, PMRA seemed to bend over backwards to accommodate sellers with delays, and generally flying under the radar,” said Bill Jeffery, public health lawyer and Executive Director of the Ottawa-based Centre for Health Science and Law.

Last week the [White House announced the formation of a 46-member Scientific Integrity Task Force](#) further to Presidential Biden’s January 2021 “[Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking](#)” that ordered, among other things, the Task Force to “prevent the suppression or distortion of scientific or technological findings, data, information, conclusions, or technical result” that will almost certainly include an investigation the EPA’s actions on Chlorpyrifos. Arguably, this approach was mirrored by the Canadian PMRA.

President Biden stated, “When scientific or technological information is considered in policy decisions, it should be subjected to well-established scientific processes, including peer review where feasible and appropriate, with appropriate protections for privacy. Improper political interference in the work of Federal scientists...undermines the welfare of the Nation, contributes to systemic inequities and injustices, and violates the trust that the public places in government to best serve its collective interests.”

Both SFM and CHSL are engaged in a judicial review of the PMRA’s approval of another pesticide, Glyphosate, currently before the Canadian Federal Court of Appeal.

--30--

For more information contact:

- Mary Lou McDonald, **Safe Food Matters**, SafeFoodMatters@gmail.com
- Bill Jeffery, BA, LLB, **Centre for Health Science and Law**, BillJeffery@HealthScienceAndLaw.ca, 1-613-565-2140 (m)
- Meg Sears PhD, Chair, **Prevent Cancer Now**, 613 297-6042 (m)