

Friends of the Earth Says Federal Pesticide Announcement A Big Step Toward Rebuilding Canadians' Trust in Pesticide Decisions: recent decisions on glyphosate and neonics eroded what little trust existed

August 4, 2021 (Ottawa) – The pesticides industry's attempt to increase the legal levels of glyphosate (Roundup) in Canadian food has been paused. In a [major shift](#) in pesticide policy, the Government of Canada is hitting the pause button to suspend decisions on maximum residue levels (MRL) for glyphosate and any other pesticide under MRL consideration until independent science is available and considered. There are [15 other pesticides](#) under active consideration for increase in maximum residue levels. More importantly, the Government of Canada will conduct a targeted review of the Pest Control Products Act (PCPA).

A serious review of the Pest Control Products Act (PCPA) is long overdue. There have been no substantive changes since it was enacted nearly 20 years ago. The Act is based on the Precautionary Principle but, in practice, appears to favour the interests of the industry it is supposed to regulate.

Friends of the Earth submitted three science-based submissions on pesticides in the past two months with requests that parallel many of today's announced changes.

"We're pleased to see many of the issues Friends of the Earth identified are being responded to in this announcement. We hope the announcement means that the Liberal government intends to proceed with pesticide regulation that is independent of corporate influence and in the best interest of human health and the environment," said Beatrice Olivastri, CEO, Friends of the Earth Canada. "Our health, our children and grandchildren's health depends on safe food and a safe environment as do pollinators and other wildlife."

Olivastri points to two recent events at Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) that underscore the need for these announced changes in pesticide policy.

Health Canada's PMRA accepted an industry request to increase the glyphosate Maximum Residue Levels in food and began a mandatory consultation period. The Agency's proposed decision ignored up to date health research that shows glyphosate and its breakdown components (metabolites) are found in human urine samples, maternal and umbilical cord serum, and breast milk samples, indicating not only bioaccumulation in human tissue but multi-generational fetal transfer of trace pesticides. Friends of the Earth and many other groups protested this plan to support a trade measure for more glyphosate residue in food rather than protecting humans and the environment.

Earlier this spring, in its decision to continue use of the neonic, imidacloprid, Health Canada's PMRA chose to use data received from an industry-led Water Monitoring Working Group, which includes Bayer, Syngenta Canada and the Canadian Canola Growers Association. PMRA

threw out research findings from Environment Canada and independent scientists and completely reversed their earlier proposed decision which was to ban imidacloprid.

“Canadians must have trust in the important decisions on which pesticides can be used and how they can be used. This includes which pesticide residues are allowed to show up on our dinner plates. Recent experiences show Canada’s pesticide regulator had been captured by corporate interests and ignored health and environmental impacts and the precautionary principle,” says Ms. Olivastri. “Today’s announcement can be the beginning of the government re-earning people’s trust on pesticide matters. A lot depends on whether we see the work of independent scientists used in decision-making.”

“In advance of a likely federal election, it would be wise for each political party to clarify its position on safe food and the integrity of science policy,” concludes Olivastri. “Canadians want food safety determined by independent scientists not faceless global corporations. And it’s clear that Canadians care deeply about the safety of pollinators. After almost a decade of campaigning to save the bees, it turns out that saving babies from toxic pesticides needs the same kind of campaign.”

In the past month Friends of the Earth has delivered three initiatives to demonstrate the urgency for action on pesticides by the Government of Canada:

- a [Brief](#) that opposes Health Canada’s proposal to raise the Maximum Residue Level (MRL) of glyphosate and maintains there is adequate new science to support a call for a Special Review of glyphosate;
- a legal [Notice of Objection](#) to Health Canada’s PMRA decision to permit continued use of imidacloprid, a bee-toxic neonicotinoid; and,
- a [Petition to the Auditor General](#) regarding serious flaws in recent decisions to permit the continued use of neonicotinoid pesticides pointing to the lack of cooperative action on pesticides between Health Canada and Environment Canada.

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Friends of the Earth Canada (www.foecanada.org) is the Canadian member of Friends of the Earth International, the world’s largest grassroots environmental network campaigning on today’s most urgent environmental and social issues.

Background to FOE Action on Pesticides

Friends of the Earth’s [Brief to oppose raising the Maximum Residue Level \(MRL\) on glyphosate](#) pointed out that this is a trade-oriented proposal rather than one that is grounded in the protection of human health and the environment as required by the Pest Control Products Act (PCPA). The PCPA requires the Minister to use the precautionary principle, which is defined as: “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall

not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent adverse health impact or environmental degradation.”

Glyphosate residues are ubiquitous in our food system, and are detectable at significant levels in in surface water, sediments and soil, respirable dust emitted by agricultural soil, a variety of crops at harvest and processed food. Furthermore, glyphosate and its metabolites are found in human urine samples, maternal and umbilical cord serum, and breast milk samples, indicating not only bioaccumulation in human tissue but multi-generational fetal transfer of trace pesticides. (Rossetti, M. F., Canesini, G., Lorenz, V., Milesi, M. M., Varayoud, J., & Ramos, J. G. (2021). Epigenetic Changes Associated With Exposure to Glyphosate-Based Herbicides in Mammals. *Frontiers in endocrinology*, 12, 671991. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fendo.2021.671991>)

Unless the use of glyphosate and chronic, multi-generational exposure can be proven to have no detrimental effects on human health, Friends of the Earth maintains that the precautionary principle requires all due caution including:
rejecting the proposal to increase the MRL for glyphosate,
reducing the MRL for glyphosate to zero, and
initiating a Special Review on the registration of glyphosate.

In its [Notice of Objection](#) to Health Canada’s PMRA decision that reversed an earlier stance to ban imidacloprid, Friends of the Earth called for:

- 1) Immediate action by Health Canada to establish an Independent Review Panel, with no PMRA representation, to address human health impacts of imidacloprid and its metabolites.
- 2) As a precautionary measure, the Canadian Maximum Residue Level (MRL) level for imidacloprid should be reduced to zero.
- 3) Significant research funds should be provided for independent scientists to conduct peer-reviewed research on neonicotinoid pesticides, a systematic bio-monitoring program should be established and delivered by Health Canada (outside of PMRA) with Environment Canada’s co-operation.
- 4) A Scientific Assessment should be conducted by Environment Canada as a prelude to listing neonicotinoid pesticides as toxic substances for the purpose of regulating under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA).

Friends of the Earth [filed a formal petition to the Auditor General \(OAG\)](#) regarding serious flaws in recent decisions to permit the continued use of neonicotinoid pesticides. It asks that two federal Ministers who share responsibilities to protect the environment from toxic contamination – Health Canada Minister Patty Hajdu and Environment and Climate Change Minister Jonathan Wilkinson – provide details on their cooperation and collaboration to protect wild pollinators using the full set of regulatory tools and international commitments at their disposal.