

# Healthy Environment Group

*Moreton Bay Shire Council Speech 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2011*

[www.healthyenvironmentgroup.org](http://www.healthyenvironmentgroup.org)

## Introduction

We are an active community group based in Samford whose aim is to raise awareness about the dangers of the misuse of herbicides and pesticides in our local environment, and alert you to the very real and adverse impacts of these chemicals on members of the community. Over the last 1 ½ years or so we have been researching and writing articles for our local papers about what we regard as the rather care-free use of herbicides and pesticides in our local environment. We have been researching the rules and regulations on the use of these chemicals in Australia and other parts of the world, the risks that have been clearly demonstrated, and actions that can be taken to minimise risk.

## Hot Off the Press

Before I give you a very brief summary about our conclusions and request to council, I will read you something “hot off the press”:

### **Activist Post, 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2011** (Sircus, 2011)

*"Yannick Chenet, a French winegrower, died after contracting leukaemia, becoming the first farmer to have his illness officially linked to the pesticides he used for years on his crops. He is among 40 or so farmers in France whose illnesses have now been officially linked to their profession and the pesticides they have sprayed on the land.*

*Dramatic deficits in brain function are seen in rural children with long-term exposure to pesticides compared with children not similarly exposed.*

*According to paediatrician Philip Landrigan of Mount Sinai Medical Center, we should have “very important concerns about the toxic effects of pesticides on children’s nervous systems.”*

## **Studies show pesticides harming Salinas Valley children - Toxic Influence | Investigative Reporting Workshop** (Kaplan, 2010)

## But let's get back to our summary:

### **Glyphosate Toxicity** (Healthy Environment Group, 2010)

PubMed=published medical science papers indexed by the US National Library of Congress, industry funded research is not included. ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed))

- Today in Moreton Shire, without knowing it, your pregnant wife can take your 4 year old to the playground 2 hours after it has been sprayed with glyphosate.

**Pub Med** Pregnant women are also at risk as others have found that glyphosate exposure from commercial preparations can affect human reproduction and foetal development in case of contamination. Chemical mixtures in formulations appear to be underestimated regarding their toxic or hormonal impact.

- Today in Moreton Shire without knowing a group of teenagers can meet in John Scotts Park, lie on the grass and share a bag of chips just after the park has been sprayed with glyphosate.

**Pub Med** The exposure of children to glyphosate should be avoided as recent animal studies have shown that commercial formulation of glyphosate is a potent endocrine (hormone) disruptor, causing disturbances in reproductive development when the exposure was during the puberty period.

- Today in Moreton Shire, your asthmatic child could have a severe asthma attack in the middle of the night because of night time council spraying with no notification- the window of the bedroom may be open. This has happened to 2 of the children of one of our members.

The Queensland Government has recently taken a significant initiative to assist the farmers near the Barrier Reef (Courtney, 2010), by providing grants for machinery and such other measures that will enable them to apply less poisonous ways of controlling weeds, the aim being to protect the Reef in case these chemicals are washed out to the sea. What about the protection of our own children though? With the implementation of the suggestions here in Moreton Shire Council, which is already known as the "Green Lunge of Brisbane", we could become the role model for all of Queensland.

Council contractors are closely watched by residents in their practices regarding spraying. They can be seen spraying without masks or protective clothing. They are seen spraying near waterways and drains just before imminent rain. We would like correct procedures to be implemented especially by council contractors, because they are role models for the community.

We believe in our right as citizens to know and the duty of Council to warn people of the use of chemicals that could be harmful to our health.

As written in our letter to Council in December 2010 in cooperation with the EDO, the Environmental Defenders Office, as our legal resource, we recommend the following procedures to be adopted by council which is in alignment with their duty of care to sensitive people:

### **A Chemical Sensitivity Register**

An official online chemical sensitivity register which can be readily accessed by any member of the community who does not wish to be exposed and also with people who already have compromised health.

We have been in contact with the Karen McKay from Byron Bay Council, who is in charge of the register there and she is very happy to collaborate with our Council and share her experience and expertise on this matter.

### **A Pesticide Use Notification Plan**

We propose the Council adopt Pesticide Use Notification Measures, so that members of our community can make an informed choice as to whether or not to walk their child or pet over a freshly sprayed footpath or play on a freshly sprayed playground- or whether to have windows open at the time of council spraying or to be home at all on that day.

That would imply notification of the public by signage, on council web site, newspaper or letterbox drops. Signs at sprayed sites on the day and for two weeks after the spraying.

### **The Use of Alternative Benign Means of Weed Control**

We strongly recommend the Council seek alternative ways of weed control in sensitive places (brush cutting, steaming) in location such as schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, public places, playgrounds, hospitals, nursing homes, places with high food consumption. With the growing research on the impact of herbicides and pesticides on human health, we would be wise to implement correct procedures before any further harm is done or any legal matters arise. Again we point out that these measures have already been taken by other local Councils in Australia and overseas.

### **Rules Regarding the Use of Chemicals on Private Property**

We strongly recommend that the Council make it a requirement that 3 day notice be given to people on the Sensitivity List from neighbours regarding their intended use of potentially harmful chemicals as part of Council's role to enforce the Environmental Protection Act.

## APVMA - Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority

You might know that the agency that is supposed to protect us in Australia in these matters is the APVMA. On our dealings with council over the time we have been frequently referred to them.

In an article in the Sunday Mail (Watt, 2009) we read, that this very agency is apparently funded largely by agricultural chemical companies, who have a vested interest in promoting the use of their products.

60 chemicals have been banned for years in Europe, which are still available over the counter in Australia. Endosulphan was recently banned here, but despite the overwhelming evidence of its dangers, it was still given a 2 year phasing out period.

The explanation of vaporisation taken from the SA DPI web site is:

**2,4-D is volatile.** It has the ability to evaporate and be transported through the air as vapour (gas). Vapour drift of high volatile 2,4-D esters is increasingly likely when environmental temperatures are high and relative humidity is low. Volatile products can “evaporate” from soil or plant surfaces, up to 48 hours after application, and drift as a vapour possibly for tens of kilometres in conditions favourable to drift. Vapour drift is **not visible** and can cause damage to sensitive plants some distance from the application site. (Another example of a high volatile chemical is Grazon DS) (Primary Industries and Resources SA, 2007)

## Graze On

The chemical Graze On, which is widely used by our council, farmers and private members of the community, is restricted by the APVMA (spraying only allowed with a permit), because of its toxicity and its ability to vaporise under certain weather conditions, turn into a gas, travel for kilometres- this is called spray drift- and linger in the air for days. But it is freely available over the counter with no appropriate labelling regarding this restriction. One incident is mentioned on the Australasian Alpaca Breeders Association, where animals got sick from eating road side sprayed grass. After being taken away and treated the animals were brought back after a week, they got sick again. (Burn, 2010)

Grazon DS is now replaced with Grazon Extra, which has the new ingredient Aminopyralid added, it seems to have gotten into the food chain in England, and gardeners who used contaminated manure don't know, if their produce is safe to eat.

## Conclusion

All this information is hard to digest. We are not going to overload you today with facts of the devastating effect of careless and misinformed use of chemicals.

But we all chipped in to buy a book for each of you, Silent Spring, the book that stopped the use of DDT in America in the 60s. Please make the effort and read it - in your role as a responsible member of your family and in your position of serving your community as council.

In conclusion, we believe that Council has a duty of care to ensure members of the community are not adversely affected by activities undertaken by council.

What we propose are common sense preventative health and environmental measures that have growing community support. We also believe that these measures are cost effective and can easily be implemented.

We, the members of the Healthy Environment Group, would like to offer our input and support to council regarding the implementation of our proposed changes.

We would like to thank you again for the opportunity to present our research and would like to leave today with the name and contact details of our contact person in council and maybe even a time, when we can meet to follow up this presentation.

## Bibliography

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