

Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment – the national voice of physicians on the environment and health

## From the President's Corner

**Working to reduce exposure to DEHP is an important first step CAPE can take.**

PROBLEMS THAT ARE BOTH ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH CARE-related are a natural fit for CAPE, problems like the use of the phthalate DEHP in medical care, the subject of one of CAPE's latest campaigns.

Diethylhexyl phthalate (DEHP) is part of a family of chemicals used to soften plastics, particularly the environmentally-unfriendly polyvinyl chloride (PVC). A solvent in cosmetics and a softener for plastic consumer products, DEHP is used widely in health care to keep tubing flexible, and in blood and intravenous bags. DEHP can make up as much as 20% to 40% of the product.

But DEHP leaches out of the plastic as you use it, into the body of whoever is connected to the tube. Several government agencies have concluded that at-risk patients, mostly infant boys, are exposed to potentially unsafe amounts of DEHP while receiving medical care.

A June 2005 study by Harvard researchers of 54 newborns in intensive care found that infants receiving the most invasive procedures had five times as much of DEHP's breakdown products in their urine as babies with few procedures.

Health Canada, in its draft position on DEHP in medical devices, has acknowledged that DEHP has the potential to cause, in humans, the kind of adverse reproductive and developmental effects seen in rodents. Of greatest concern is the risk to developing testes. Health Canada's draft position calls for the use of alternatives to DEHP-containing PVC tubing for vulnerable groups like infant males where they may be exposed to high doses. But no action is being taken.

Exposure to DEHP is environmental as well. The Canadian government officially declared DEHP an environmentally toxic substance over a decade ago. Due to its wide use, DEHP and many other phthalates are everywhere; we consume them everyday.

...continued on page 2



photo: Maple Sugar Bush, emerging design

## Breaking News!

### London a Step Closer to Pesticide-Free

ON MARCH 27<sup>TH</sup>, LONDON CITY COUNCIL VOTED 16-3 TO PROCEED WITH A BYLAW that will phase-out lawn pesticides by September, 2008. The vote followed an extensive campaign by CAPE which included opinion polling (please see page 2 for details), publishing articles and letters on pesticide hazards, and direct meetings between doctors and city councillors. "This was a truly collaborative project," said CAPE's Executive Director, Gideon Forman. "We owe a huge thanks to CAPE members who called and wrote city councillors and to our partners – the Canadian Cancer Society, the CAW, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, the Ontario Medical Association, and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. Our efforts will protect over 300,000 people from toxic lawn products."

**UPCOMING AGM - Notice of the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, November 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006 (Sunday and Monday) in Toronto. The venue has yet to be announced.**

**Mark your calendar and see you in Toronto!**

## President's Corner...continued from page 1

And as the various phthalates work in similar ways, it is important to look at their combined exposure.

New studies continue to link phthalate exposure to effects on boys' reproductive systems. A European study last year found decreased free testosterone levels in 3-month-old boys associated with higher levels of breast milk phthalates. A U.S. study in the same year showed that infant boys whose mothers had higher prenatal phthalate levels were less masculinized on average.

Working to reduce exposure to DEHP through health care is an important first step CAPE can take in decreasing overall DEHP exposure. It will help protect infants most at risk, reduce the total burden of phthalate exposure in Canada, and decrease our use of PVC plastic, the most environmentally hazardous of all plastics.



photo: Sean, 3 weeks, emerging design

**Safer and affordable alternatives exist. Your help will be needed to spread the message that DEHP is a potential problem in our hospitals, and that children need to be protected.**

Dr. Kapil Khatter, CAPE President



## 4 out of 5 Londoners say “No” to Pesticides

A NEW PUBLIC OPINION POLL SHOWS FOUR OUT of five residents of London, Ontario (81%) support a phase-out of pesticides in city parks.

The poll also found nearly three out of four Londoners (74%) support a pesticide phase-out on private residential property.

The survey – which was launched at a February 8<sup>th</sup> media conference – was the first step in a new CAPE-Canadian Cancer Society campaign to win a pesticide bylaw in this southern Ontario city of 300,000 residents.

“We’re extremely pleased with these findings,” said Laura Wall, Manager of the Canadian Cancer Society’s Elgin-Middlesex Unit and host of the media conference. “They show overwhelming public support for a phase-out and should build momentum for a pesticide bylaw.”

The poll received substantial media coverage, appearing on the front page of the *London Free Press*’ city section and on several radio and TV newscasts. CAPE Chair Dr. John Howard, who spoke at the media conference, was quoted extensively.

Following the release, CAPE Executive Director Gideon Forman presented the results to the city’s Environment and Transportation Committee. “We’re hopeful city council will respect the wishes of the vast majority of Londoners and pass a pesticide bylaw at the earliest possible date,” Forman said. “Doing so would bring London in line with the 70 other communities across Canada that have passed these bylaws to protect their water supply, family pets, and, most important, their children.”

**There’s a growing consensus that homeowners should maintain their property using non-toxic methods.**

The London poll was consistent with polls CAPE has commissioned in other Canadian cities. “Whether it’s Ottawa, Peterborough, or Edmonton, about 3 out of 4 residents support a lawn pesticide phase-out,” said Forman. “There’s a growing consensus that homeowners should maintain their property using non-toxic methods. It’s really becoming a national movement.”

The survey was conducted by Oracle Poll, a leading research firm. A total of 525 randomly selected Londoners were interviewed. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.3%.

# Organic Farming: A Doctor's Perspective

by Dr. Art Wiebe

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO ARGUE THAT "CONVENTIONAL" FARMING, AS PRACTICED currently, is sustainable. Sustainability suggests that topsoil will not be depleted of its depth, tilth, nor its biodiversity. Net nutrients, soil depth, and workability would remain stable from year to year, in a sustainable system. It would take faith which would be the envy of the most cynical snake-oil salesman to believe that we can sustain current farming practices.

Soil is an organism, not a medium. It is a living ecosystem, which requires constant feeding. "Conventional" farming treats soil as a medium, much like in hydroponic gardening. The soil is depleted by continual monocropping, with nutrients being extracted (ie. as our, or animal, food), with replacement attempted by means of petroleum-based fertilizers. Further, application of chemical pesticides and herbicides (also petroleum-dependent) further impoverishes the soil ecosystem.

If agriculture on Planet Earth is sustainable, the only way is to use only the energy from the sun, and carbon and nitrogen from the atmosphere. Other nutrients must be recycled back into the topsoil.

Why is organic food so expensive? The short answer is that it's not. When you purchase organic products, you are paying in full for the inputs (fuel, labour, waste disposal, cleanup of contamination, etc.). When you buy chemically-farmed products, you are effectively making a down payment on your food or other products. Your taxes subsidize the petrochemical industry, and in the future there will be a huge cleanup bill. Cleanup of the Great Lakes alone, to remove agricultural chemicals, would cost billions. The interest on the down payment is adding up. If we paid this cost now, organic products would be cheap, by comparison.

CAPE is venturing into discussion of the sustainable practices required for a healthy ecosystem, of which human life is a part. We have returned as a presence at the annual Guelph Organic Conference. Several medical students have been a part of this. Much as in the cosmetic pesticide issue, our role will be in supporting other groups. It is more difficult to see the connection between organic agriculture and human health, unless we remind ourselves of the big picture.

Where do CAPE's interests lie in the promotion of sustainable agriculture? In the big picture, we are all connected – we cannot have healthy people in an unhealthy ecosystem.

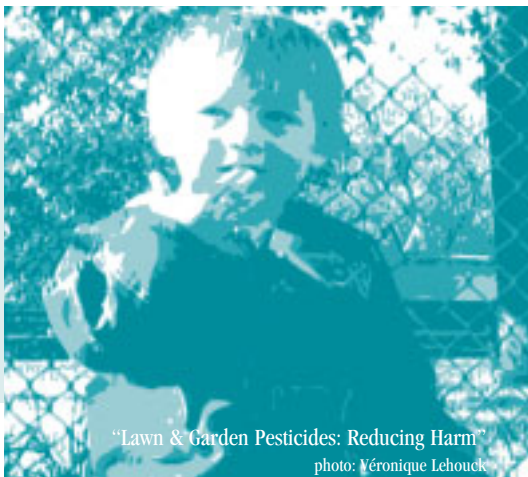
## CAPE Wants to Hear from YOU!

Dear CAPE member,

We will be commencing a 3-year strategic planning project shortly and would love your input. CAPE's past work has included greening health care and municipal pesticide reduction in various municipalities. But as we move into the future, where would you like to see CAPE put its energies? Which issues within environmental health would you like to see us addressing?

Please email your responses to Daniella Grosvenor at [daniella@cape.ca](mailto:daniella@cape.ca), or you can write to us.

Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you soon.



"Lawn & Garden Pesticides: Reducing Harm"  
photo: Véronique Lehouck

## Lawn & Garden Pesticides: Reducing Harm NOW AVAILABLE!

CAPE's long-awaited video on lawn and garden pesticides. This unique 10 minute video sets out the scientific evidence linking common household pesticides to a variety of serious illnesses, including cancer, reproductive problems, and neurological diseases. It offers information from the Ontario College of Family Physicians' ground-breaking pesticide study and sets out safe lawn care alternatives. **Excellent for showing at public meetings or for educating local politicians.**

To order your copy of the video, please contact Daniella Grosvenor, Executive Assistant, at : [daniella@cape.ca](mailto:daniella@cape.ca)



## I would like to join CAPE in working for a healthier environment

Last Name/First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Dr  Ms.  Mr.  Miss  Mrs.  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership

- Members \$100
- Supporters (*Honorary mention and a free copy of The Canadian Guide to Health and the Environment*) \$200
- Students, retirees, those with limited income \$25
- Member Organizations (*one vote per organization*) \$50  
(*My cheque is made out to the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment*)
- I would like updates on CAPE-related activities. Please put me on the CAPENEWS listserv (*for members only*).
- I want to get involved in CAPE.

### Donations

I am sending a donation of:

- \$50  \$100  \$500  \$1000  Other \_\_\_\_\_ to support CAPE's environmental advocacy work (*My cheque is made out to the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment*).
- Please take a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ from my account each month. (*I have attached a voided cheque and signed below*)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

- I would like a charitable tax receipt for my donation. I understand that these donations will only be used for research and education activities. (*My cheque is made out to the Canadian Health and Environment Education and Research Foundation (CHEER)*)
- Check here if you do not want your name shared with other like-minded organizations.

### Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

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### CAPE ACKNOWLEDGES, WITH GRATITUDE, THE GENEROSITY OF OUR FUNDERS:



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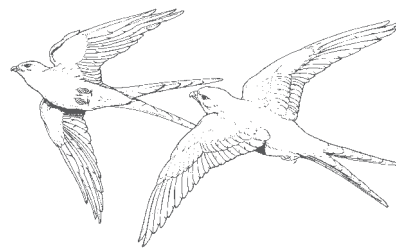
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## ECO Friends

This feature section contains a brief synopsis of a group that shares CAPE's basic perspectives.

### Pesticide Free Ontario

Founded in 1999, *Pesticide Free Ontario* (PFO) is a network of over 100 individuals and organizations working to replace the non-essential use of pesticides with sustainable, non-toxic alternatives. PFO works with environmental organizations, labour unions, scientists, health professionals and municipalities to restrict pesticide use on public and private property. CAPE and PFO worked very closely together to deliver the *Children's Health and Municipal Pesticide Use Project* and provided expert advice for the video, "*Lawn and Garden Pesticides: Reducing Harm*". At present, *Pesticide Free Ontario* is working to restrict pesticide use across the entire province of Ontario.

Full details about this campaign are at  
[www.pesticidereform.ca](http://www.pesticidereform.ca).

