



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec
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The Canadian Chemicals Management Plan:

To what extent is the Canadian government protecting its citizens?

What is the CMP?

Chemicals are a vital part of industrial activity, whether they be essential for the production of goods or an undesirable yet inevitable byproducts of industrial processes. In the agri-food industry, their extensive use leads to environmental degradation and illnesses, but remain essential to ensure farmers' productivity and food security for now. However, this heavy reliance on chemicals also entails a need for control. This is the goal of the Canadian Chemicals Management Plan (CMP). According to the Canadian Government, the CMP is an "initiative aimed at reducing the risks posed by chemicals to Canadians and their environment."¹ In other words, the CMP evaluates the health and environmental effects of chemicals, and then categorizes them in lists depending on their toxicity.

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A need for more transparency and accessibility

A striking feature of the Canadian Government's list of "toxic substances" is that it is short and vague.² Only 131 substances are on the list. But which of them are banned, or restricted, or waiting to be addressed? The government is not making this clear. Over the 3,160 chemicals identified as potentially dangerous that the CMP evaluated between 1984 and 2018, how come only 131 made it to the toxic substances list?³ For example, several forms of neonicotinoid are still legal and used in Canada.⁴ This widely used pesticide is known for its deadly effects on honeybees. Bees come in contact with neonicotinoid used in crops or orchards. The chemical accumulates in the pollen they gather, thus poisoning a colony.⁵ And yet, it is common knowledge that honeybees, vital to ecosystems and our food security, are an endangered species.

Bans and regulations are not the CMP only mission: it also has to find better chemicals to use as substitution. But here too, the CMP does not appear to be up to the task. Bisphenol A (BPA), is a common chemical that is used to make plastic hard and clear. It is found in baby and water bottles or food containers. In the long term, this chemical can cause cancer and reproductive, immunity and neurological problems. To tackle the issue, the Canadian government banned BPA, and replaced it with BPS. However, they seem not to have done their homework: BPS has been found to be just as toxic as BPA, but also takes longer for the body to eliminate than its predecessor.⁶

The European Union has exhaustive lists easier to find and more transparent: we know that there are 720 chemicals banned and 910 chemicals severely restricted in the European Union.⁷ Do Canadians not deserve the same amount of transparency and protection? The Canadian government is lucky: all the work has already been done on the other side of the Atlantic. What is left to do is take the European framework and apply it to Canada. Moreover,



the evaluation of the toxicity of chemicals has to go faster, and the chemicals used for substitution need to be tested and proved to be safe before being released to the public. But for that to happen, the government has to restrict (or at least turn a deaf ear to) chemical companies and corporations' lobby, whose industry is worth millions of dollars every year. ⁸

¹ Government of Canada, *Chemicals Management Plan*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/chemical-substances/chemicals-management-plan.html>

² Government of Canada, *List of Toxic Substances Managed Under Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/management-toxic-substances/list-canadian-environmental-protection-act.html>

³ Government of Canada, *Follow-Up Report to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development on the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (2018)*, p.7

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/eccc/documents/pdf/cepa/FollowUpCepaReport-eng.pdf>

⁴ Government of Canada, *Update on the Neonicotinoid Pesticides* (January 2020), <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/consumer-product-safety/reports-publications/pesticides-pest-management/fact-sheets-other-resources/update-neonicotinoid-pesticides-january-2020.html>

⁵ Kurzgesagt, *The Death Of Bees Explained – Parasites, Poison and Humans*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqA42M4RtxE>

⁶ CBC, *BPA substitute may be more harmful than original say Guelph researchers*, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/bisphenol-bpa-bps-university-guelph-plastic-pyle-1.5427840>

⁷ ECHA European Chemicals Agency, *Chemicals Subject to PIC*, <https://echa.europa.eu/information-on-chemicals/pic/chemicals>

⁸ Radio Canada International, *Canada 'must' review pesticides banned in Europe*, <https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2016/05/24/canada-must-review-pesticides-banned-in-europe/>

Recommended educational Videos:

Kurzgesagt, *Is Organic Really Better? Healthy Food or Trendy Scam?*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PmM6SUn7Es>

Kurzgesagt, *The Death Of Bees Explained – Parasites, Poison and Humans*,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqA42M4RtxE>