

FRANCE BANS USAGE OF PESTICIDES IN TAXPAYERS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES GARDENS



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A new Bill aiming at “creating a better framework for the use of plant protection products within the National borders”

A bill (known as No 2014-110¹) passed in Parliament in January 2014 states that as of 2020, plant protection products will be banned for use in French local authority public gardens and in private gardens two years later.

The draft bill which was proposed by the environmentalist Senator Joël Labbé was designed to establish a better framework regarding the use of plant protection products within national borders. In essence, the Act bans plant protection products, commonly called pesticides (insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, parasiticides, etc):

- from 1st January 2020 for their use in maintenance of green spaces, forests and footpaths open to the public, with the exception of specific areas such as airports, rail tracks, etc. (Article 1);
- from 1st January 2022 for their sale, use and storage for non professional usage with

the exception of fighting against propagation of harmful species. Non-compliance with the law will incur penalties (Article 2).

This second article targets specifically the 45% of French citizens who own a garden or an allotment, which represent approximately 5-10% of pesticides usage in the country – the remaining 90-95% being used in the agricultural sector.

Many environmentalists believe this is a small victory in the fight against the blanket use of pesticides with the new law becoming the cornerstone that will change people’s attitude and behaviour towards these products.

Having said that, approximately 40% of French towns and cities haven’t waited for this new law to start the “green revolution” toward more environmentally friendly maintenance of public green spaces. In Versailles, for instance, pesticides have been entirely replaced by thermal,

mechanic and hand held cutters, saving 130,000 litres of pesticides and £25,500 annually. In Nantes and Rennes (Brittany) usage of pesticides has decreased in the last 10 years by 95% and 90%, respectively.

The French Government pushes on several fronts to accelerate the demise of pesticides usage

The Secretary of State for Agriculture, Mr Stéphane Le Foll, has proposed amendments on a draft bill on the future of agriculture, food and forestry which have been well received by MPs in July 2014 and the Senate in the Autumn. In its current wording, the bill proposes that spreading plant protection products will only be permitted in areas close to schools, nurseries, nursing homes, hospitals or health centres when specific safety measures have been put in place to reduce drastically exposure of vulnerable people.

PESTICIDES, A HETEROGENEOUS “CLASS” OF PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS

Of approximately 1,000 products that have accessed the market, 309 are authorised for use in France. These vary according to their mode of action, target, chemistry and half-life period in the environment. They are to be found everywhere in the environment: in the air inside and outside as dust; in underground, surface or littoral waters; in the ground and even in some food, including drinking waters. Professional exposure generally occurs via cutaneous way but can also take place via the respiratory system in fumigation or usage in close environment. In the general population however the most common route is oral exposure via food intake.

Among these measures were existence (or new planting) of hedges or spreading at specific times and days. Failing this, spreading will not be permitted in a specific area surrounding the location, the size of which will be determined locally on a case by case basis.

If the co-chair of the Environment party, Barbara Pompili, indicates that Mr Le Foll's amendments wording is a "compromise" that represent "a good start" she insists that the use of pesticides is "a challenge for public health issues that affects all parties – farmers, their families and the general public that lives nearby". Given that arable land represents approximately half of the French territory, this accounts for a lot of people.

In parallel three items of another draft Bill, this one on Biodiversity proposed by Mrs Ségolène Royal, Secretary of State for Ecology, were passed in the Assemblée Nationale. These concerned:

- the outright ban of aerial application of pesticides from the end of July 2014 for crops such as sweet corn, popping corn and banana



Jardin des plantes in Nantes

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- and at the end of 2015 for rice and some vineyards;
- the promotion of natural products for plant treatment and maintenance via their acceleration of regulatory approval for marketing authorisation;
- extending the action «Terre saine, communes sans pesticide» (Healthy ground/earth, pesticide-free towns) and bringing forward by 4 years the expected starting date at which the law should enter into force from 1st January 2020.

These new laws are supported not only by the French public but also by new scientific evidence

All these measures come at a time of growing discontent among the French population regarding the use of pesticides: a petition asking for restriction of their use in areas close to schools and habitations has registered nearly 100,000 signatures in less than a week and an increasing number of GPs voice their anxiety. In addition, two meta-analysis of scientific publications were

... environmentalists believe this is a small victory ...



Family garden in Versailles

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published within a year.

In the first, the French Government (Directorate General for Health) commissioned the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research (Inserm) for a meta-analysis of scientific publications of the last 30 years in order to obtain more evidence-based information regarding the health hazard posed by pesticides, in particular on their suggested links with

several pathologies including cancers, neurological diseases, reproductive effects. Experts from different backgrounds (epidemiologists in health-environment or occupational health, cellular and molecular toxicologists) worked in collaboration to produce a thorough report which was published in June 2013². The results (in French), confirm the possibility of a positive association between professional exposure to pesticides and various adult diseases such as Parkinson disease, prostate and several hematopoietic cancers. Similarly, exposure to pesticides during prenatal and perinatal periods seems to show increased risks for the infant's development.

The second meta-analysis, titled "systemic pesticides pose global threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services" was published by The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides³ on 24th June 2014. The conclusions confirmed that pesticides neonicotinoids and fipronil cause significant damage to a wide range of invertebrate species (including earthworms, insect pollinators such as bees and butterflies and fresh water snails and water fleas) and are measured in significant concentrations in wider areas due to spreading via natural water systems.

References

- 1 <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000028571536&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id>
- 2 <http://presse-inserm.fr/pesticides-effets-sur-la-sante-une-expertise-collective-de-linserm/8463/>
- 3 <http://www.tfsp.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WIA-PR-REL.pdf>