



Weed Management Advisory Children's Campaign to *Protect our Children from Toxic Pesticides*

29 April 2020

"We have a moral responsibility to act when there is doubt, not when victims emerge".⁽¹⁾

Open letter to Auckland Mayor Phil Goff from the Weed Management Advisory and Pesticide Action Network Aotearoa New Zealand (PANANZ).

Dear Mayor Goff - It has taken the Covid-19 lockdown to bring into sharp focus the fact that whilst we are doing everything to protect our children from this virus, we are utterly failing to protect them from the toxic pesticides they face every day on their roads and parks and playgrounds. The thought of returning to the same old unnecessary poisonous regime after this pandemic is over is abhorrent.

As we note in our Children's Campaign launch this lockdown has given us all time to reflect on the past, and contemplate the future we need – not least a future where all our children are safe from the actions of their own Council.

Dear Mayor Goff, as you know from all the presentations, petitions, submissions and appeals, the Weed Management Advisory – together with PANANZ and tens of thousands of Aucklanders - has been working tirelessly to achieve positive change for decades. In spite of all the promises and chemical reductions plans from your Council, it hasn't happened, and that is utterly disgraceful.

In 2017 the WMA appealed to you, Mr Mayor, to transition our city to nonchemical public spaces immediately to protect our children, in accordance with the Council's Weed Management Policy. We pointed out that the city had wasted four years (now seven years) since the Policy had been passed that could protect them, and that every year another vulnerable and precious 20,000 babies are born in Auckland. That is now 140,000 extra babies this Council has put in harm's way.

This poisoning of our children must not continue, Mr Mayor. Every week brings more expert scientific evidence of the detrimental impacts of pesticide exposure on vulnerable developing children's bodies, including on their immune systems, making them more vulnerable to infections such as COVID-19.

What makes this such an emergency is that these frightening effects are evident from lower and lower levels of exposure such as those in the sprays your Council uses on roadsides, parks and playgrounds. Sprays you blithely assume to be safe, contrary to an overwhelming mass of independent scientific studies.

Dear Mayor Goff – we appeal to you to take the time to read the evidence in our [Protect our Children from Toxic Pesticides](#) campaign on our website. Not only have we been researching and documenting the adverse effects of toxic pesticides, but the solutions.

The fact is that Auckland has the ability to maintain the entire city's roadside vegetation nonchemically - and over half its citizens in wealthier suburbs have actually enjoyed this for twenty years. But for the children it is a different matter. Over half Auckland's children live in lower socioeconomic areas where they still endure toxic pesticides on roads and parks that they cannot

avoid. This inequality is an iniquitous situation that should have been remedied long ago, and something you could change – tomorrow, Mr Mayor.

Baskut Tuncak, the UN special Rapporteur on Toxics said in 2016:

“Children in low-income, indigenous, minority or otherwise marginalized communities bear a disproportionate burden of our inaction on toxic chemicals, implicating the human rights principles of dignity, equality and non-discrimination. In my view, the only solution to this injustice is the prevention of exposure.”

“... the only solution is the prevention of exposure”

Please, Mayor Goff, this is an environmental, health and human rights emergency and children cannot wait any longer. We need to get toxic pesticides out of their lives. We cannot continue to poison their future.

We appeal to you to make the shift to nonchemical methodologies, now, so that as we move out of lockdown, we can continue to keep our children safe; so that when they all go back to school it is not via streets that have been sprayed with chemicals that can impair their ability to learn. We stand ready and willing to work with all and everyone to support you in bringing this about, Mr Mayor.

Kind regards

Hana Blackmore
Dr Meriel Watts
Brendan Hoare
For the *Weed Management Advisory* and *PANANZ*.

(1) Ibrahim Thiaw, Asst Secretary-General of the UN in his [opening statement](#) at the UN* meeting in 2017 on the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions.