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Campaign launches to make London first UK city to ban toxic pesticides in public spaces

Ahead of the London-wide council elections on 3rd May, concerned residents from across the city are asking candidates of all political parties to pledge to make their borough pesticide-free if elected.(1)

Launched this week by the charity Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK), the Pesticide-Free London campaign aims to end the capital's use of toxic pesticides which are currently sprayed in a wide array of public spaces including parks, playgrounds, housing estates and pavements.

Josie Cohen from PAN UK said, "Most Londoners don't realise that their local council uses a huge amount of toxic pesticides. We're surrounded by these chemicals every day despite evidence of the significant harm they can cause to our health and the environment. The real scandal is that urban pesticides use is unnecessary. There are lots of safe and sustainable non-chemical alternatives available which have been proven to work."

At last count, 41 different chemicals were being used in UK towns and cities.(2) They have been linked to an array of health problems including cancer, diabetes and neurological disorders such as Parkinson's. Vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and old people are most affected.

Pesticides are also having devastating effects on London's natural environment. They destroy many of the areas where wildlife such as bees, birds and hedgehogs forage for food and contaminate the natural resources they depend upon, including water. Dogs are regularly poisoned by pesticides used in public parks and other green spaces.

Recent polling revealed that more than two-thirds of UK citizens want their local schools, parks, playgrounds and other open spaces to be pesticide-free.(3) In 2016, Hammersmith & Fulham became the first London borough to ban pesticides from its parks, roads and council housing estates. France has banned pesticides in all its public, green spaces from 2020.

There are a range of non-chemical approaches designed to replace pesticides, from high-tech solutions such as hot foam systems which kill plants using heat to manual techniques like hand weeding and mulching. Communicating with the public is also essential. Local residents tend to be supportive of ending pesticide use once they understand the health and environmental benefits.

"London likes to think of itself as a world leader but is really lagging behind other major cities, such as Toronto, Edinburgh and New York when it comes to protecting residents and wildlife from harmful chemicals", added Cohen. "We urge everyone standing in the local council election to take our pesticide-free pledge. PAN UK is keen to work with all London councils to help design bespoke strategies for moving away from pesticides. "

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NOTES TO EDITOR:

- (1) For more detail on PAN UK's 'Pesticide-Free London' pledge visit: <http://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free-london-pledge/>
- (2) Department of Environment Food, Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Pesticide Usage Survey Report 254, Amenity Pesticides in the United Kingdom, 2012, <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/pusstats/surveys/documents/amenity2012v2.pdf>
- (3) Polling commissioned by PAN UK and SumOfUs and conducted by GQR Research, September 2017, <https://gqr.app.box.com/s/0ddbifc853j9k1t1sbjvuc1crvxw8zbc>.
- (4) For more information on PAN UK's Pesticide-Free Towns campaign visit: <http://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free/>
- (5) Pesticide-Free London logo and logos for all 32 London boroughs available from PAN UK upon request.