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## Everything Old is New Again

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They say that if you live long enough, you'll get to see history repeat itself. That there is truly nothing new under the sun, and eventually the same types of humans, will fall into the same types of habits, make the same decisions, and we are forever doomed to walk the same path - over and over again.

Apparently, I have lived that long.

A few months back, I heard rumblings that our friends in Quebec are rushing headlong into another round of Municipal pesticide bans. While this may be a new dance for the younger Superintendents; for my generation, this is a case of 'déjà vu all over again' (to quote an even older guy). We already did this once.

Let me take you back to the summer of 2003. Apple introduced the third generation iPod along with iTunes. The iPhone was another four years away from release, so we all had Blackberry's (I still would, if they still made them). American Idol was brand new, and Finding Nemo was dominating my household. Eighteen-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo was playing his rookie season in the Premiere League. Buffy the Vampire Slayer was the most popular thing on TV, the Terminator was Governor of California, and Britney Spears kissed Madonna on MTV.

But what ended up dominating my life for the following years, were the repercussions of a little known, two-year-old Supreme Court decision, which upheld a Municipal Cosmetic Pesticide Ban By-Law in Hudson, Quebec. It took a while for that seed to germinate, but when it did, it grew like the weeds they weren't allowed to kill anymore. Before long - Ottawa, the Town of Caledon, and every other Municipality in Ontario was facing public pressure to adopt a similar By-Law. At the time, I was on a rural Township Council with four farmers; so we dispensed with this one pretty quickly, but urban Ontario was awash with Dandelion Festivals and public meetings to gather the opinions of the uninformed.

I had recently joined the OGSA Board, but



since I had six years of experience on Township Council and a decade of teaching pesticide safety courses to farmers for the Ontario Government - I was volunteered to represent the Superintendents Association and the Golf Industry at countless public meetings, townhalls, and ultimately at the Environment Minister's office. I was far from alone. Wendy Burgess was there, Vince Kishimoto came from the NGCOA, and the late Teri Yamada represented the RCGA (now Golf Canada). Between meeting with the Minister's office and various MPP's, we spent our evenings trying to fight the current of public opinion at various gatherings across the province. We weren't home much in those days. The meetings were an odd mix of pseudo-science, theatre, and heckling. Random anecdotes would receive standing ovations, while actual Guelph Professors (Dr. Solomon was a rock at these things) would be ridiculed and mocked.

In the end, the Provincial Government realized that having swiss cheese legislation, where one county could keep good greens, while the next town over would be riddled with disease and weeds, was unfair and unreasonable competition. Eventually, the actual scientists at the Ministries of the Environment and Agriculture took control of what was always their responsibility, and the IPM program (which you all know and love)

was the compromise that was reached. I tell anyone who complains to me about it, that things could have been much, much worse. At one point, I was absolutely convinced that we were going to lose the use of all pesticides on golf courses in Ontario.

So the million dollar question is, "Why is Quebec doing this again, and should we be concerned in Ontario?" Well, it's time for the political science nerd in me to shine!

It is a fundamental difference in how Upper and Lower Canada were structured, way back in the 18th century. France controlled Lower Canada (now Quebec), and they believed in the power of city states to control their own destiny. The higher levels of government were in many ways subject to the whims of local attitudes. It's a much more populist way of governing - sort of a 'power to the people' thing.

The British, on the other hand had no such delusions that the opinions of the 'great unwashed' were of any consequence. Under British democracy, the municipalities are 'creatures of the state' and only have the authority given to them by the Crown. In Canada, you don't own your property, King Charles owns it, but he lets you use it at his great mercy. Queens Park could disband every Municipality in Ontario tomorrow with the stroke of a pen and run the whole she-bang from Toronto.

As a result, the MECP has the authority to crush a Cosmetic Pesticide Ban (or any other Municipal By-Law), whereas in Quebec the province (ironically called the National Assembly) can only strike down By-Laws that don't meet the minimum standard. Ergo, a Quebec municipality can make more restrictive rules any time they want - and here we are.

If the Ontario government continues to hold the position that the IPM program, alongside MECP inspections, is adequately protecting Ontarians from the risk of pesticide use, we will be fine. If that position changes, I assure you that we will let you know - and I guess we'd have to do this all over again. ■