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Top health groups disappointed by weak pesticide report

VANCOUVER, May 17, 2012 /CNW/ - BC's top health organizations are expressing disappointment after a BC legislative committee on cosmetic pesticides released a report today calling for weak restrictions on lawn and garden pesticides.

"If these recommendations become law, they will not protect all British Columbian children from being exposed to unnecessary chemicals and possible carcinogens," said Barbara Kaminsky, CEO, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon. "We waited years for the BC government to follow the lead of other provinces and BC municipalities, and this is the result? The report was slow in coming and is weak in content. It is disappointing overall".

The health groups - which include the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), the Lung Association, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and the Public Health Association of BC - had requested strong legislation banning the sale and use of all pesticides for lawns, gardens and non-agricultural landscaping.

"Doctors are displeased that, given all we know about pesticides and illness, the committee would offer something so weak" said CAPE Executive Director Gideon Forman. "We will continue to urge the BC government to implement strong province-wide cosmetic pesticide legislation, similar to Ontario's.

There is broad public support for cosmetic pesticide legislation in BC. Over 70% of British Columbians support provincial legislation to restrict pesticide use, according to polling commissioned by the Canadian Cancer Society in 2010. More than 35 BC municipalities have already adopted bylaws restricting the cosmetic use of pesticides, and delegates at the 2008 and 2009 Union of BC Municipalities Conventions voted in favour of resolutions calling on the BC government to ban the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides province-wide.

During the two public consultations that the BC government has conducted (in 2010 and 2011), some 8,000 British Columbians responded to each consultation and the vast majority of respondents were in support of province-wide legislation. Most recently, health and environmental organizations succeeded in making pesticides an issue in the Port Moody-Coquitlam by-election.

"To say that a lot of people are afraid of chemicals because they don't understand the science is insulting to the majority of British Columbians in support of legislation and those who responded to the committee's consultation," says Forman.

Considerable evidence supports a link between pesticides and cancer incidence, reproductive problems and neurological diseases. A definitive cause and effect relationship between cosmetic pesticide use and cancer is unlikely to be firmly established, but enough is known to be prudent and prevent exposure to children, especially when the use of these chemicals is unnecessary.

"We've conducted polling and an awareness campaign and in response thousands of citizens contacted the BC government in support of a ban," says Forman. "Both the Premier and the Health Minister supported eliminating the use of cosmetic pesticides during the Liberal Party leadership race and we hope that they will continue to do so," says Forman.

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