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Committee opposes total ban on cosmetic pesticides

THE VANCOUVER SUN By Jonathan Fowlie | Vancouver Sun – 10 hours ago

A legislative committee led by Liberal MLA Bill Bennett has rejected an outright ban on cosmetic pesticides, saying the scientific evidence demonstrates such a move is not necessary.

"The evidence just simply does not support a recommendation to ban pesticides for cosmetic use in British Columbia," the Kootenay East MLA told reporters Thursday as he released the committee's report.

"Committee members representing the majority are satisfied with how the [federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency] registers and re-evaluates pesticides and are confident with the scientific integrity of the federal processes," he added, blaming calls for a ban on "chemophobia" and "a lack of scientific literacy."

But within hours, Environment Minister Terry Lake said he believes "we do need to look at a provincewide ban."

"I think all of us should have open minds," said Lake, adding he will give the report careful consideration before moving ahead.

"However, it will have to be pretty convincing for me to change my opinion. But I want to leave that opportunity for when I read the report and go through the details."

Lake said he does not take issue with scientific evidence on pesticides, but rather on how the chemicals are used by people who don't have proper training.

"Whereas I believe in the science of Health Canada and the rigour they put these pesticides through, I'm not as confident that every consumer uses them in the way that Health Canada would want you to," he said.

"I think knowledge and using these chemicals appropriately is the key, not the chemicals themselves."

The legislative committee was formed last year at the request of Premier Christy Clark, who at the time said she favoured a province-wide ban but wanted to consult on the issue before moving forward.

The resulting Liberal-dominated all-party committee took submissions from more than 8,600 groups and individuals.

The committee made 17 recommendations, including: restricting access to commercial-class pesticides by uncertified users; tightening rules for the sale of pesticides; and improving public education.

New Democratic Party environment critic Rob Fleming, who also served as the deputy chair-man of the committee, called the report "disappointing."

"It's a completely disappointing set of recommendations that the government majority has tabled in the house," he said, adding he thinks there should be a provincial ban on cosmetic pesticides.

"Where pesticide use, and in this case the cosmetic use of pesticide, is unnecessary there should be a zero tolerance for the risks associated with human health."

Others also offered immediate criticism.

"Doctors are displeased that, given all we know about pesticides and illness, the committee would offer something so weak," Gideon Forman, executive director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, said in a news release.

"We will continue to urge the B.C. government to implement strong provincewide cosmetic pesticide legislation, similar to Ontario's."

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