

Monday Mag

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The week

Posted By: Monday Magazine Staff
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No more poisoned petals

Around this time last year, Monday noted that while the Canadian Cancer Society talks a big game about its distaste of pesticide use for cosmetic purposes on lawns and gardens, the daffodils hawked by society volunteers around the country each spring are grown in fields where potentially carcinogenic herbicides and fungicides are used to ensure good growth.

That revelation prompted a letter to Monday from British Columbia and Yukon Division Canadian Cancer Society CEO Barbara Kaminsky who promised, "Following this season we will be putting out a request for proposals that includes pesticide-free daffodils commencing in 2008."

So did the cancer society live up to its promise? It seems so.

"We do have a contract in place with a supplier in B.C. and the Yukon that stipulates the daffodils that we sell will be free of a full spectrum of pesticides," says Kathryn Seely, manager of public issues for the society's B.C. and Yukon division.

The supplier in question is Central Saanich's Vantreight Farms. Seely was unsure whether Vantreight is the sole daffodil provider to the society's B.C. and Yukon division, but noted the Island farm is the source of most of the daffodils the cancer society sells.

Farm owner Ian Vantreight did not return Monday's call by press time, but phoned the following day to say his operation meets the cancer society's requirements.

"Neither the herbicide or the fungicide we use are applied to the flowers," Vantreight told Monday. "The cancer society's concern is for growth stimulants. We don't use any of them, so we are more than in compliance with their concerns around those types of pesticides."

While the Canadian Cancer Society supports a ban on cosmetic pesticides—and will shortly ask the B.C. government to implement a province-wide ban—it has stopped short of demanding a ban on commercial pesticide use, citing the need for more research on the subject.

Student seeks higher status

Federal First Nation status cards are always a subject of controversy. Some see them as an extension of the country's dark colonial past. Others view them as proof of entitlement to much-deserved government restitution. Tara Williamson wishes hers would get her into the bar.

The 25-year-old law student at the University of Victoria says despite meeting all the necessary requirements, her status card—her only piece of government-issued photo ID—is repeatedly denied at establishments around the city by bouncers who refuse to accept it as valid identification.

“Other provinces list status cards as enumerated pieces of ID that [establishments] should accept, but we don't have that in B.C.,” says Williamson, who moved to the city in 2006. “So what you have is a category of discretion where owners are allowed to say [to their employees], if for some reason you doubt the authenticity of this piece of identification, you are allowed to turn this person away.”

Williamson says she has been denied entry to Lucky Bar and purchases at the Harris Green liquor store, and has also experienced trouble at the doors of the Sticky Wicket and Sugar—where she eventually made her way in with an expired international student card.

Provincial Liquor Control and Licensing Branch spokesperson Terry Rowsell says customers must present two pieces of ID, provided the first piece is issued by a government agency and includes the person's name, signature, birth date and picture. The province does not provide establishments with a comprehensive list of valid IDs.

“Having said that, the First Nation's status card actually meets that criteria, because it is a government of Canada ID,” says Rowsell.

He adds that while those who present valid ID can be let into an establishment, it doesn't mean they will be.

“It is not our business to regulate all the business of establishments,” says Rowsell. “We provide what the government rules and laws are and then it's up to the establishment to sort of interpret that.”

Williams counters that definitive rules are needed, lest bouncers and their employers be accused of racism. “That way, regardless what the [bouncer's] subconscious was saying, legally they would be required to let me in, without an incredibly valid reason otherwise.”

Rowsell speculates that because the most commonly held First Nation status cards don't have an expiry date and are simply laminated paper, establishments might not accept them for fear they were forged.

“If the government is issuing ID that easy to forge, and establishments aren't accepting it, then that's a problem with the issuing party,” says Williamson. “That is the government's responsibility.”

She says the situation has dragged on for so long she refuses to get another form of government-issued photo ID out of principle.

“That’s the other irony, that Indian status cards are ridiculous and I hate them,” she says. “There’s so much stuff caught up in them that’s so dumb. But, you fight for what you’ve got, and that’s a status card right now.”

When the rubber hits the road

It would seem the Victoria Police Department is digging deep to raise the necessary funds to pay for 19 new officers it hopes will join the force this year.

Cyclist James Murray sent a letter to Monday this week to let us know about his—get ready for this—\$632 ticket for cycling infractions.

Murray says he was pulled over by Victoria cops while riding from his downtown apartment to a friend’s house two weeks ago.

Over the course of the ensuing lecture on cycling safety, Murray was issued two tickets listing a total of six infractions: no helmet, no reflector, no front light, riding on a crosswalk, riding on a sidewalk and running a red light.

Murray’s letter claims he rode half-a-block out of his front door on the sidewalk, then turned left onto a one way street against a yellow light.

“Apparently the officers in question felt that my crime was so severe I should receive a ticket the equivalent of one month’s rent,” he says.

Murray’s case doesn’t elicit much sympathy from the Greater Victoria Cycling Coalition’s John Luton.

“In principle, all of those things are offences for which I have always encouraged the police to come down on cyclists for,” says Luton. “[Cyclists] should expect to be fined if they do something stupid.”

However, Luton says fines are generally levied in a more discretionary manner than the one in question, and he has long encouraged the city police to institute diversion programs so riders caught breaking the rules of the road could take a safety course instead of shelling out cash for first offences.

Fleming fumes over tax break

One month after the 2008 provincial budget was unveiled, Victoria-Hillside NDP MLA Rob Fleming is still scratching his head over the Liberal government’s plan to scrap the corporation capital tax for banks and credit unions doing business in the province.

“While citizens around the province repeatedly say that affordable housing is their biggest concern, the government just went and gave a \$220 million tax cut to the mortgage lenders,” says Fleming.

“Is the banking sector really that crucial to the health of our economy that we need to prop it up with a huge tax break?” Fleming told Monday.

So what did the financial sector do to deserve this government largesse? As it turns out, nothing more than ask for it.

“There has been a request to phase out this particular capital tax for as long as I have been around government and I’ve looked back many years and certainly that request has been there,” B.C.’s finance minister Carole Taylor told Monday.

“I’d been going around speaking to business groups and individuals known to be strong supporters of the economy—for instance the head of the Business Council of British Columbia—asking, what would you do if you had a chance to, you know, really give the province’s economy a boost? Are there barriers in the way? Almost without exception, just about the first thing anyone would say was ‘The capital tax. You’ve got to get rid of the capital tax.’”

As a capital tax, businesses were penalized not on the size of their profits, but on their total assets. Taylor says this was a disincentive for financial companies to set up shop in B.C., though she hasn’t had any specific promises from firms that would do so now that the tax is on its way out.

So for all you British Columbians whining about the fact the government doesn’t hear your concerns, apparently all you have to do is join the B.C. Business Council and hold out your hand.

Work begins, permits be damned

Monday learned this week, true to the “cut first, ask questions later” approach to development in Langford, that the municipality does not yet have a Section 9 Ministry of Environment permit for alterations it is making to streams flowing into Spencer’s Pond at the site of the proposed Spencer Road highway interchange.

Section 9 MoE approval is required for “any modification to the nature of the stream including the land, vegetation, natural environment or flow of water within the stream, or any activity or construction within the stream channel that has, or may have an impact on the stream.”

“[Langford has] applied for Section 9 approval. They don’t have approval for their application yet—that is for changes in and around the stream—and that’s where we’ve asked [Langford] for more information around the pipes,” environment ministry communications director Kate Thompson told Monday.

— Jason Youmans

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