

Province eyes ban on use of cosmetic pesticides at home

Growing body of evidence links insecticides and herbicides to cancer and leukemia

BY RANDY SHORE, VANCOUVER SUN JULY 6, 2011

The provincial government is working toward legislation that would ban home use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes, a practice that is linked to childhood leukemia and other cancers.

A bipartisan special committee on cosmetic pesticides headed by Vancouver-Fairview MLA and physician Margaret MacDiarmid will meet for the first time today at the Wosk Centre for Dialogue. The term pesticide is an umbrella for common garden insecticides, herbicides and fungicides.

Premier Christy Clark expressed support for the committee soon after taking power and on the heels of legislation introduced to implement a ban drafted by the New Democrats. The committee, which will make recommendations to the legislation, includes MLAs from both the NDP and the B.C. Liberals.

At least 38 municipalities, including Vancouver, have already enacted local bans on some common pesticides, but a provincial ban would include controls on the sale of pesticides that are beyond the powers of local governments, said MacDiarmid, a cancer survivor.

Residential pesticide use is increasingly linked to cancer and in particular childhood leukemia, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. The society is among 20 environmental and health-related organizations that have called on the government to ban unnecessary pesticide use, including the Sierra Club of BC, the Suzuki Foundation, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and the University of B.C. Faculty of Medicine department of pediatrics.

More than 100 epidemiological studies have shown links between various cancers and the use of pesticides on lawns and gardens, said Kathryn Seely, director of public affairs for the B.C. and Yukon division of the Canadian Cancer Society.

"The links are there and [pesticides] are reasonably anticipated to cause childhood leukemias, non-Hodgkins lymphoma, childhood brain cancer and prostate and lung cancers in men and women," she said. "Children are more vulnerable and susceptible to exposure to pesticides in part because their bodies are growing and their organs are developing and also because they play so close to the ground, they lie on the ground and put things in their mouths."

A Web-based public consultation initiated by the province late in 2009 drew 8,000 responses, overwhelmingly in favour of stricter controls on cosmetic uses of pesticides.

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