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Councillors support cancer society's anti-pesticide efforts

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Coquitlam NOW

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Politicians, agencies and lobby groups are making yet another concerted effort to snuff out the use of cosmetic pesticides in B.C. one month after the provincial government initiated an online consultation about the issue.

The Canadian Cancer Society B.C. and Yukon Division, in consultation lobby groups including Toxic Free Canada, the David Suzuki Foundation and the Public Health Association of B.C., is proposing far-reaching legislation that would include an immediate ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides on all sports fields; require municipalities to pass stringent cosmetic pesticide bylaws similar to anti-smoking bylaws; ban the use of cosmetic pesticides on B.C. golf courses within three years; and establish a public education campaign and a "white list" of low-risk products that can be used as alternatives to cosmetic pesticides.

"What we're saying is that for cosmetic purposes, just to improve the appearance of lawns and gardens, you don't really need to use these toxic substances," said Barbara Kaminsky, CEO of the Canadian Cancer Society B.C. and Yukon Division.

"There are some alternatives and there's no harm that you'll experience as a result."

Kaminsky added that the society's proposal includes some exemptions for both the agriculture and forestry industries.

"You need to make sure that you can still afford to have available food for people at a reasonable cost. You don't want to do something that's going to destroy the forestry industry," she said Tuesday.

Coquitlam had its fair share of public discourse on the issue last year, as both councillors Selina Robinson and Lou Sekora introduced varying notices of motion to curb pesticide use.

Robinson's motion sought to have a public information session about the use of pesticides in Coquitlam, while Sekora called on the federal government to ban "pesticides and other chemicals deemed to be unsafe by federal government scientists or pose any risk to human or environmental health."

Both motions were defeated.

"At this point, if you can't even have a conversation, you get stuck," Robinson said last week. "Even outside of our jurisdiction, there are people who don't understand why our civic politicians aren't even having the dialogue. In spite of that, the citizens are taking the ball and doing that dialogue."

The citizens Robinson is referring to are a group of local residents called the Coquitlam Pesticide Awareness Coalition, which was formed shortly after Robinson's motion was defeated last spring.

"Our message to the public is to take part in [the consultation process]," said coalition member Jane Thomsing. "Our council doesn't seem to want to have any public input process at all and kiboshed it right away, but here's an opportunity to comment to the province."

For more information on the provincial consultation process, which runs until Feb. 15, log on to www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/ipmp/regs/cosmetic-pesticides/consultation.htm.

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