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Cancer society calling for ban on cosmetic pesticides

City of Regina environmental committee reviewing proposed ban

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Garden supplies are out in stores may have many people thinking ahead to summer yard work, but the Canadian Cancer Society is wants people to stop before they spray for weeds.

The cancer society is pushing for a ban on the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides in Regina through meetings with the environmental committee. Their concern is over the cancer-causing agents found within some pesticides.

Senela Begic-Le is the Cancer Control Coordinator with the Canadian Cancer Society and noted that they are not asking for a ban on all pesticides.

"We're not actually talking about all pesticides in the province, we're only talking about cosmetic, non-essential, beautification-purpose only type pesticides," she said.

Begic-Le said many typical cosmetic chemical pesticides contain carcinogens or cancer-causing agents and the society wants to see them banned from use on lawns, gardens, playgrounds, church yards and city parks.

Research on cancer link still early

She admitted the research on the link between cancer and common pesticides is not entirely convincing yet, because it is early in the process and has only been a topic of interest for 15 or 20 years.

"The research is very suggestive - we have over 106 studies now in the last decade alone, suggesting that the link is growing between certain types of cancer and cosmetic pesticides," Begic-Le explained.

The list of cancers with possible links includes kidney, pancreatic, prostate, lung, breast and non hodkins lymphoma.

She also noted that a big concern is childhood cancers are on the rise as well and lot of the early research suggests this is due to pesticide exposure.

"Kids are rolling in their school yards in the grass, putting their fingers in their mouth without washing their hands in between," she said.

Another concern is for pets because they also have a lot of exposure to pesticides on yards and parks.

'Pre-emptive' strike compared to tobacco

Begic-Le said the cancer society is calling for an early ban on pesticide use as a pre-emptive strike for prevention, comparing the situation to tobacco.

"We waited three or four decades for there to be convincing evidence that tobacco causes lung cancer to do something about it," she noted.

In retrospect, she said if the society had taken action against tobacco use earlier - especially in public places - they could have saved lives and saved money for the healthcare system.

Regina is not the only city exploring the option of banning cosmetic pesticides. A lot of places have already stopped people from spraying certain chemicals to make their lawns greener. Nova Scotia, PEI, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick have bans along with more than 39 municipalities in B.C.

Begic-Le pointed out this means there are several examples for the city to turn to for guidance. At this point the decision lies in the hands of Regina's environmental committee to make a recommendation to city council.

The committee has another meeting later this month.

If a ban does go through, people will still have natural options to keep lawns green from organic corn gluten which prevents dandelions and vinegar formulas that burn down weeds. For insects you can use things like garden sulphur and even broken up sea-shells to name a few.

Edited by News Talk Radio's Adriana Christianson

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