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## B.C. committee rejects pesticide ban



Kootenay East MLA Bill Bennett

*Tom Fletcher/Black Press*

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VICTORIA – The B.C. Liberal majority on a legislative committee has recommended against a province-wide ban on cosmetic pesticide use, after a year of hearing from farmers, foresters, environmental organizations and interested citizens.

Kootenay East MLA Bill Bennett chaired the committee whose four B.C. Liberal members outvoted three NDP members calling for a province-wide ban on common

household herbicides, insecticides and fungicides used for visual effect.

The majority recommended that retail sales should be treated similar to tobacco, kept out of sight and available only by request from someone with training in how to use the chemicals.

Bennett said the most compelling testimony came from a representative of Health Canada, which approves such products for use across the country. The committee was told that B.C. was the first province to ask Health Canada before considering such a ban, and that imposing one would be a political rather than a public health choice, Bennett said.

Bennett noted that only five per cent of pesticide application is by household users, using products diluted 100 times or more below the level that shows effects in the most sensitive animal species. The widespread belief that common lawn and garden products cause harm when used as directed is based on "chemophobia" and a lack of scientific literacy, Bennett said.

"The majority of the committee concluded that we could not justify second-guessing the 350 scientists who work at Health Canada," Bennett said.

NDP environment critic Rob Fleming noted that Premier Christy Clark formed the committee after publicly agreeing with NDP leader Adrian Dix that the cosmetic pesticide ban should be enacted. A province-wide ban would equalize a patchwork of municipal restrictions around the province and stop retail sales the public, he said.

The committee's recommendations go against up to 80 per cent of public opinion, and would leave B.C. "dead last" in provincial regulations, Fleming said.

Bennett said he discussed the recommendations with Clark before she left on a trade mission to Asia, and she offered no objections. Cabinet could still overrule the committee and impose a ban, which he acknowledged would be much more politically popular.

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