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BC government and Canadian Cancer Society respond to pesticide decision

by Adrian Barnes on 18 May 2012



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It's duelling press releases as the provincial government and the Canadian Cancer Society react to the BC Pesticides Committee's decision to reject an outright ban of pesticides in our bucolic province.

First, the government:

B.C.'s Bipartisan Pesticides Committee Rejects Outright Ban on Cosmetic Pesticides

VICTORIA – Kootenay East MLA Bill Bennett has tabled the all-party Special Committee on Cosmetic Pesticides report after a nearly year-long consultation and engagement process to examine and make recommendations about the use and sale of pesticides, including those used solely for cosmetic purposes.

In releasing its report, the Committee made 17 recommendations including restricting the sale and use of Commercial-class pesticides, enhancing the enforcement of existing regulations, strengthening public education, and training related to the use of pesticides. Recommendations were also directed towards retail regulations, the golf industry, and the safe disposal of unwanted pesticides.

"In making our conclusions and recommendations, we received thousands of submissions from British Columbians and our committee was briefed by stakeholders, environmental groups and experts, including scientists from Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency," said Bennett. "Based on the evidence that was presented to us, the Committee agreed that further restrictions over the sale and use of pesticides in B.C. are warranted – and this is reflected in our 17 recommendations."

After listening to presentations from subject experts and studying the evidence presented, a majority of the Committee concluded that there is currently insufficient scientific evidence to warrant a province-wide ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides.

"The majority of the Committee concluded that we could not justify second guessing the 350 scientists who work at Health Canada," said Bennett. "There simply is not enough evidence that justifies an outright ban on cosmetic pesticide use. We are not prepared to tell homeowners that they cannot purchase federally-approved Domestic-class pesticides or hire a qualified contractor to apply these federally-approved weed and bug control products to their lawn."

The Committee was first appointed in June 2011 and was given the task of examining the scope of a possible ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides.

In seeking input from British Columbians, environmental organizations, regulators and industry organizations, the Committee received initial briefings from Health Canada and the BC Ministries of Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, listened to presentations from 27 invited stakeholders, and hosted a two-month long e-consultation process.

More than 8,600 individuals and groups participated in the e-consultation process, resulting in the most submissions a B.C. parliamentary committee has ever received. These included responses through an online questionnaire and written or video submissions.

"I want to thank the thousands of British Columbians who took the time to make their thoughts known, those who made presentations, and my fellow MLAs who served on our committee. On a personal note, I would like to thank Premier Christy Clark and her cabinet for letting our committee get on with the job of studying this subject and making recommendations unencumbered and on our own volition."

The Committee was the first all-party parliamentary working group in Canada to investigate the cosmetic use of pesticides and BC is the first province to make such a strong commitment to understanding pesticide regulation and the work and role of the Health Canada.

The Committee's report can be found here: www.leg.bc.ca/pesticidescommittee
(<http://www.leg.bc.ca/pesticidescommittee>).

And here's what the CCS has to say:

Top health groups disappointed by weak pesticide report

For Immediate Release, May 17, 2012: Vancouver—BC's top health organizations are expressing disappointment after a BC legislative committee on cosmetic pesticides released a report today calling for weak restrictions on lawn and garden pesticides.

"If these recommendations become law, they will not protect all British Columbian children from being exposed to unnecessary chemicals and possible carcinogens," said Barbara Kaminsky, CEO, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon. "We waited years for the BC government to follow the lead of other provinces and BC municipalities, and this is the result? The report was slow in coming and is weak in content. It is disappointing overall".

The health groups – which include the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), the Lung Association, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and the Public Health Association of BC – had requested strong legislation banning the sale and use of all pesticides for lawns, gardens and non-agricultural landscaping.

"Doctors are displeased that, given all we know about pesticides and illness, the committee would offer something so weak" said CAPE Executive Director Gideon Forman. "We will continue to urge the BC government to implement strong province-wide cosmetic pesticide legislation, similar to Ontario's.

There is broad public support for cosmetic pesticide legislation in BC. Over 70% of British Columbians support provincial legislation to restrict pesticide use, according to polling commissioned by the Canadian Cancer Society in 2010. More than 35 BC municipalities have already adopted bylaws restricting the cosmetic use of pesticides, and delegates at the 2008 and 2009 Union of BC Municipalities Conventions voted in favour of resolutions calling on the BC government to ban the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides province-wide.

During the two public consultations that the BC government has conducted (in 2010 and 2011), some 8,000 British Columbians responded to each consultation and the vast majority of respondents were in support of province-wide legislation. Most recently, health and environmental organizations succeeded in making pesticides an issue in the Port Moody-Coquitlam by-election.

"To say that a lot of people are afraid of chemicals because they don't understand the science is insulting to the majority of British Columbians in support of legislation and those who responded to the committee's consultation," says Forman.

Considerable evidence supports a link between pesticides and cancer incidence, reproductive problems and neurological diseases. A definitive cause and effect relationship between cosmetic pesticide use and cancer is unlikely to be firmly established, but enough is known to be prudent and prevent exposure to children, especially when the use of these chemicals is unnecessary.

"We've conducted polling and an awareness campaign and in response thousands of citizens contacted the BC government in support of a ban," says Forman. "Both the Premier and the Health Minister supported eliminating the use of cosmetic pesticides during the Liberal Party leadership race and we hope that they will continue to do so," says Forman.

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And now, of course, we can all sit back and wait for the ALL CAPS COMMENTS to start appearing..