

Groups push B.C. to ban cosmetic pesticides over health risks

BY TAMARA BALUJA, THE PROVINCE JUNE 4, 2010 9:30 AM



Several groups are urging the B.C. government to ban the use of cosmetic pesticides province-wide. They say there are environmental and health risks associated with chemicals used strictly to kill weeds.

Photograph by: Laurie L. Ward, MCT file

Several B.C. health organizations are pushing the government to bring in province-wide legislation banning the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides.

Pesticides used to get rid of weeds in lawns and gardens are purely cosmetic, but pose a significant health risk, says Barbara Kaminsky, CEO of the Canadian Cancer Society for B.C. and Yukon.

“It is time that the government did the right thing and protected its residents from an unnecessary cancer risk,” she said, adding that the Liberal government has been deliberating on the issue for over two years. “At some point, enough is enough.”

“This ban has nothing do with pesticides used for agriculture or forestry — so why the delay?” Kaminsky said.

The Canadian Cancer Society and seven other groups, such as the Public Health Association of B.C., say B.C. should follow the lead of Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia in enacting provincial legislation.

More than 25 municipalities in B.C., including Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond and Maple Ridge, already have bylaws to restrict the use of lawn and garden pesticides.

“Either you hand pick those dandelions or you just accept the fact that you have a few weeds in your lawn,” she said.

Dr. Bruce Lanphear at UBC's department of pediatrics says the "decision makes great sense, particularly for protecting children."

He said repeated exposure to pesticides can cause behavioural problems in children, such as ADHD. Kaminsky also said several studies have linked cosmetic pesticides and cancer, such as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, childhood leukemia and cancers of brain, lung and prostate.

Miles Hunter, general manager at the David Hunter Garden Centres in Surrey, said his store currently sells cosmetic pesticides. But he would support the ban of synthetic cosmetic pesticides, so long as natural pesticides, such as pyrethins, are still available to customers.

"I think the biggest problem is that people over-apply them and don't follow the proper directions," he said.

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