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COLUMNISTS

Ban on pesticides would be a winner

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Premier Christy Clark and Opposition Leader Adrian Dix are to be commended for supporting a province-wide ban on the sale and use of lawn and garden pesticides.

Not only will this legislation be hugely popular, it will also have a very positive effect on the health of B.C.'s people, environment, and economy.

How can we be sure? Because we've seen what happens when pesticide regulations are passed in other provinces.

The first result, not surprisingly, is a very low pesticide usage rate. Quebec's pesticide ban started to take effect in April, 2003. By 2007, chemical pesticides were being used by just four per cent of households with a lawn or garden. By contrast, in B.C. — which lacks a province-wide ban — the figure was 25 per cent.

The Ontario College of Family Physicians tells us pesticides are associated with brain cancer, prostate cancer, kidney cancer, and pancreatic cancer. The College makes a point of saying some children exposed to pesticides have an increased risk of leukemia, especially if they come into contact with "insecticides and herbicides used on lawns, fruit trees and gardens..."

When Ontario's pesticide ban came into effect in April, 2009, the province removed more than 250 of these toxic products from the market.

The Ontario ban is also improving water quality. The provincial Ministry of Environment studied pesticide concentrations in 10 urban streams before and after their ban came into effect (2008 vs. 2009) and compared the findings.

The study's author states: "Concentrations of 2,4-D, dicamba, MCPP, total phenoxy herbicides and total insecticides were significantly lower in 2009..."

In fact, in some streams pesticide concentrations were up to 97 per cent lower. That's an extraordinary result and suggests a province-wide pesticide ban in B.C. would have similar benefits for local waterways.

The Ontario ban has also been well-received by lawn care businesses. The firm Environmental Factor — which makes a non-toxic corn-gluten-based weed inhibitor -- had a 400 per cent increase in sales and manufacturing in the ban's first six months. Product demand was so great the company had to move to larger premises.

Other Ontario firms said they viewed the new legislation as an opportunity for business growth and new hiring. (Organic lawn care, which includes hand-weeding, is more labour-intensive.)

And business expansion also occurred when pesticides were banned by municipalities. For example, in the five years following passage of a pesticide bylaw in Halifax, the number of landscaping and lawn care businesses in that city grew by 53 per cent, according to Statistics Canada.

Finally, this legislation is a winner with the public. Polling done in the B.C. by Innovative Research Group and released in February, 2011 found support for a phase-out of “cosmetic” or non-essential pesticides was over 70 per cent.

Perhaps most significantly, the study found support for the phase-out does not differ between rural and urban areas. The message for government couldn't be clearer: No matter where they live in the province, the vast majority of British Columbians want an end to toxic lawn products.

Good for human health, beneficial to the environment, a boost to business: these are some of the reasons our most respected health organizations – including the Canadian Cancer Society, the Learning Disabilities Association, the Lung Association, and the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation – support a province-wide prohibition on non-essential pesticides.

We would urge British Columbians to e-mail the Premier (premier@gov.bc.ca">premier@gov.bc.ca) today with one simple message: This summer give us the protection from pesticides already enjoyed by millions of other Canadians.

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