



Victoria opts to cut pesticide use

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BY THE VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 16, 2007

VICTORIA - A draft bylaw intended to curb pesticide use the city is weak and "full of loopholes" say critics, including the Canadian Cancer Society and one of the city's advisory committees.

But Victoria councillors this week gave preliminary approval to a "pesticide use reduction" bylaw which, if passed, will allow the city to use pesticides on its own fields without permits but require residents to obtain \$25 permits in some situations.

Businesses would be exempt from the bylaw, as city staff advised council the community charter giving municipalities the right to regulate pesticides did not extend to commercial enterprises.

Lehna Malmkvist, head of the city's environment and shoreline advisory committee, said the committee wants the application of pesticides to be the exception rather than the rule, and the way the city's bylaw is worded, "that's not clear."

In an e-mail, the committee urged council to strengthen the bylaw "and make Victoria a leader on this issue in the Capital Regional District."

In particular it noted "the CRD model bylaw banned the use of pesticides, period, whereas the Victoria bylaw has a number of loopholes. The CRD model bylaw was simple and easy to understand. It was also the result of much consultation and consideration."

The CRD draft bylaw required that adjacent landowners be given written notice when a pesticide is applied. No such provision is made in the city bylaw, an issue also highlighted by the environment committee.

In 2005, a CRD subcommittee drafted a model bylaw for the 13 area municipalities -- which have the jurisdiction to regulate pesticide use -- to consider.

While the CRD doesn't have the authority to regulate the area, it was hoped that crafting a model bylaw would result in unified regulations throughout the region. But almost all municipalities rejected the draft.

Victoria council agreed to go forward with a pesticide bylaw but asked its staff to come back with a made-in-Victoria version. The CRD, meanwhile, is working on a public education program.

In a report to councillors, Michelle Gorman, the city's integrated pest management coordinator, warned that sports fields could become dangerous and pest-infected trees might die if pesticides were not included in the city's arsenal.

Since the pesticide issue arose in 2005, council has received a steady stream of correspondence, almost all urging the municipality to develop tight rules on pesticide use.

"I do not believe that we should risk our children's health in order to have perfect lawns," Caspar Davis wrote to council, adding that he supported pesticide rules extending to a ban on sales.

Nancy Falconer, community action coordinator for the Canadian Cancer Society, Vancouver Island Region, wrote to council commending it for steps taken so far, but said the draft bylaw had limitations, including its definition of non-essential use of pesticides, areas where the bylaw doesn't apply and the permitting procedure.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business wrote the lone letter urging the council to focus on public awareness "on the responsible use of pesticides and lawn care alternatives rather than implementing a ban or severe restrictions on pesticide use."

Meanwhile, Dr. Richard Stanwick, chief medical health officer for the Vancouver Island Health Authority, wrote Gorman saying the city "has struck an appropriate balance in its proposed bylaw and have addressed as what could be perceived as competing interests."

Stanwick rejected the position taken by the Canadian Cancer Society, calling Falconer's position "extreme" and discounting some of the research papers commonly used to support strong rules around pesticide use and linking some chemicals used in pesticides to cancer.

He urged the city to commit to reforming the bylaw should new research become available.

An estimated 130 communities in Canada have bylaws regulating pesticides and in Quebec the province has enacted a ban. Ontario is being lobbied by medical and environmental organizations for similar laws.

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