

EDITORIAL

Pesticide industry must stop denials

The pesticide industry was fighting back in front of a sympathetic audience in the Okanagan last week, but it's still losing ground in the overall public relations battle.

Speakers at a conference of pesticide applicators criticized the ever-growing number of municipal bylaws limiting pesticide use, including one taking effect in Kelowna.

In an interview, lobbyist Jeffrey Lowes declared bylaws limiting pesticide use are based more on faith than science.

"Properly used, according to the labelling instructions, they are all safe," he said.

University of Guelph toxicologist Keith Solomon was to cite scientific studies at the conference that defend pesticide safety.

Kelowna's bylaw will bar homeowner

use of pesticides on trees, lawns, shrubs and flowers.

Commercial and agricultural applicators will still be allowed to ply their trade. Fruit and vegetable gardens are also exempted from the bylaw — along with, hypocritically, city lands.

The pro-pesticide folks don't yet understand why their side is losing. It's because they're suffering a credibility problem.

They may be right that pesticides can be used safely, but they don't seem to respect legitimate concerns raised about their industry.

Right now, some of them sound like the industry-funded lobbyists who used to deny that cigarette smoking was harmful.

The purpose of pesticides is to kill things — weeds, bugs and whatever detracts from a perfect-looking garden or lawn.

Pesticides are poisons. It's as simple as that, and it is foolish to try to convince the people that poisons do no harm.

Much pesticide use is for cosmetic purposes only. That's not a good reason to put more harmful ingredients into our ecosystem.

Some people need to get over the ideal of having the perfect lawn.

Lowes is surely correct when he says pesticides can be used safely if you follow the instructions. That's not an unreasonable message.

But the industry has to clear away the rest of its verbal garbage before people will heed the nuggets that make sense.

It's about credibility, and the industry will lose on that count as long as it continues to play the denying game.

— City editor Pat Bulmer