



## Surrey students push for ban on pesticides

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Vancouver city council passed a motion in 2004 banning the use of most pesticides for cosmetic purposes as of January 1, 2006. Effective the same day, Port Moody and West Vancouver also banned the cosmetic use of pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides on private property. This year, Burnaby and the District of North Vancouver joined the club after being approached by the Canadian Cancer Society. New Westminster council voted last month to ask staff to bring forward a similar bylaw for the Royal City.

But Surrey, the region's second-largest city, has so far shown no inclination to take action. And that has mobilized six students in Kwantlen University College's environmental-technology program to kick some political ass.

Caron Adderley, Darren Maslack, Nicole Mueller, Erin Shankie, Bridget Trousdell, and Rebecca Yanciw formed a group called LEEP (which stands for Love Our Environment—Eliminate Pesticides). "We're in an environmental-law class this summer," Adderley explained in a phone interview with the Georgia Straight. "Our task was to find an issue, especially one that's a hot topic....As a group, we're kind of tasked with getting a law changed."

They took up the pesticide issue, published a brochure about it, and started attending community events to educate the public. Earlier this month, Adderley said, they were ordered to leave Bear Creek Park's promenade when they showed up with brochures and petitions at a city-sponsored environmental event.

"A city employee asked us to leave the grounds, and basically said we were against the official Surrey policies," Adderley said. "We weren't in line with their policies on pesticides. They didn't want the public to be confused about the fact that this is not an official Surrey policy."

On Monday (July 28), LEEP members will appear before Surrey city council to push for a bylaw banning the use of cosmetic pesticides on private and public property. "It is one of the fastest growing cities in B.C., and they are one of the few that hasn't done this yet," Adderley said.

Mae Burrows, executive director of Toxic Free Canada, told the Straight in a phone interview that some pesticides and herbicides contain carcinogens that have been linked with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Several studies have been published on this topic in peer-reviewed medical journals.

Burrows said that some pesticides and herbicides also contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals, which can have a serious impact on children's sexual development. They can lead to low sperm counts and the earlier onset of puberty in girls. "It's not the dose," she said. "It's the timing of the dose."

In addition, Burrows said, many pesticides contain neurotoxins that kill insects by changing the enzyme balance in their brains. "So you can affect children's learning and behavioural capacity by exposing them to neurotoxins, which are in pesticides," she said.

That's not to mention the impact on salmon populations, birds, and pets. For politicians, another motivating factor is public opinion.

In April, the Canadian Cancer Society released an Ipsos Reid telephone poll of 3,200 randomly selected adults in B.C. It showed that 76 percent believe that cosmetic pesticides pose a threat to their health; the same percentage support a provincial law restricting the sale and use of these products. Approximately 85 percent of respondents with a lawn or garden said they would be willing to use alternatives to pesticides.

LEEP's brochure acknowledges that the City of Surrey has adopted a program called Integrated Pest Management, which is designed to minimize the use of harmful chemicals in parks. But the brochure points out that pesticides are still being used by private residences, golf courses, and lawn services, as well as being sold at local retail outlets. It makes reference to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study noting that the pesticide 2,4-D doubles the risk of a dog developing canine malignant lymphoma.

Vancouver's pesticide program allows for the use of pesticides under certain circumstances, such as to purify water for use by humans or animals; to disinfect swimming pools, hot tubs, spas, and wading pools; to control termites; within enclosed buildings; to exterminate or repel rodents; and as an insect repellent for personal use.

Pesticides containing soap, mineral oil, silicon dioxide, ferric phosphate, sulphur, biological-control organisms, borax, acetic acid, and pyrethrins are also allowed.

"A number of municipalities have acknowledged that not all pesticides are the same," a 2004 Vancouver staff report states. "Some by-laws identify a list of products or a group of products, which are much less potentially harmful to humans or the environment. This could mirror the list of provincially exempted pesticides, as stated in the BC Pesticide Control Act."

Burrows said she was pleased that Burnaby city council's motion doesn't allow "pay-and-spray permits", which undermine pesticide bylaws by allowing operators to pay a fee to use harmful products. "You can deal with your buttercups in a different way than spraying a carcinogen on them," she noted.

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