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BC Recommends No Ban on Most Pesticides

British Columbia releases most detailed study of so-called "cosmetic pesticides" which recommends no ban on most products

by Art Drysdale

by Art Drysdale

email: art@artdrysdale.com

Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>



May 20, 2012



Since I have no particular photos to illustrate my topic this week, I have included eight new or newer shots from our garden here in Parksville. Above, Water Hawthorne (*Aponogeton distachyus*) is said to be a tropical water plant, and no doubt in Ontario it may be, but here it survives in our pond year after year with no special protection—it has a nice fragrance. Daphne odora is a delightful shrub that blooms early—this shot taken on April 23; two more early bloomers here, Ribes sanguinea and a good pink Camellia—shot taken on April 29 (the Camellia is still in bloom); and in our waterside garden (subject to deer visits regularly) two colourful brooms (*Cytisus scoparius* 'Moonlight' and 'Cs.' 'Hollandia'). Below, two new primroses in our collection in the compost area, *Primula acaulis* and *P. vialii* (Chinese pagoda).

On June 2nd last year, in its third session, the Legislative Assembly of the B.C. Government struck a Special Committee on Cosmetic Pesticides. On Opening Day of the fourth session, October 3, 2011, the Legislative Assembly reappointed the Special Committee on Cosmetic Pesticides, "to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to the elimination of the unnecessary use of pesticides in British Columbia and to conduct consultations on this issue with the public and key stakeholders, by any means the Special Committee considers appropriate."

The report was released in the B.C. Legislature on Friday May 17th. I was one of over 8,600 folks who responded to the committee's request for comments. I did mine electronically as did most of those who responded. Having now read the entire report, I decided the best way to summarize what it says here would be to quote the actual Executive Summary in the report itself. So, herewith, some selected paragraphs from that Executive Summary.

"Over the course of its inquiry the Committee studied the existing federal-provincial regulatory framework, heard varied opinions from over 8,600 e-consultation participants, and examined bans in other jurisdictions. The Committee concluded that despite the intensity of arguments in favour of a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides and a general misunderstanding of the risks associated with chemicals, there is insufficient scientific evidence to support a province-wide ban on pesticides for cosmetic use. The majority of the Committee supports using science-based evidence and will not restrict access to products that are approved for safe use in Canada. In its commitment to "protect the public and reduce the use of pesticides according to the IPM principles," the Committee has focused its recommendations on strengthening regulations on pesticide sales, monitoring and education. The unnecessary use of pesticides can be reduced by providing British Columbians and businesses with the education, tools and support necessary to make informed pest management decisions.

"Of the 7,300 e-questionnaires submitted, almost 5,000 supported a ban on the sale and use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. Presentations from stakeholders and written submissions received through the e-consultation process provided varied perspectives on four main themes: the safety of pesticides; the use of pesticides in residential and industrial settings; the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency's (PMRA) process of testing and registering pesticides for sale in Canada; and existing pesticide legislation in British Columbia.

"Over the course of its ten-month-long inquiry the majority of the Committee was struck by the information it received on the PMRA's extensive pesticide registration process. The process includes comprehensive and precaution-based evaluation of risk in situations where homeowners apply pesticides. Officials from the BC Ministry of Environment provided information on the Integrated Pest Management Act that governs pesticide sale and use in the province.

"The Committee dedicated a significant amount of time to examining research from stakeholders and the public that proposes a link between pesticides and negative health outcomes. It also heard about the possible negative effects pesticides can have on the natural environment. Submitters encouraged the Committee to recommend a province-wide ban based on the view that the precautionary principle is not being applied. Those who argue a ban is unjustified emphasized the thoroughness of the scientific processes the PMRA uses to determine that pesticides are safe for sale and use in Canada. They also stressed the important role pesticides play in improving the value and enjoyment of green spaces, in controlling invasive plants, and in supporting forestry and agriculture.

"As part of its inquiry into the feasibility of a BC ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides, the

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primrose); a dose-up of the Chinese pagoda primrose; though we see Camassia esculenta growing in the wild, we seldom see it in gardens but I managed to keep this one doing well; and our lovely un-named pink azalea at the front door porch at its best currently. Author photos.



Committee re-viewed other jurisdictions' experiences with bans. While these bans generally share a common purpose — the protection of human health and/or the natural environment from perceived unnecessary exposure to pesticides — the approach varies from province to province. In examining what other jurisdictions have done, the Committee noted that to date no other province has used an all-party parliamentary committee to investigate the cosmetic use of pesticides. Also, this Committee's commitment to understanding pesticide regulation and the work and role of the PMRA appears to be unprecedented.

"Throughout the committee inquiry the all-party Special Committee worked in a collaborative manner and strived to seek common ground. However, committee members have divided on party lines over the justification for a province-wide ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides. The Committee assessed all the evidence carefully, taking more time than originally planned, and the majority of members concluded that currently there is insufficient scientific evidence to warrant a province-wide ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides. Based on currently available studies, the majority cannot justify disagreeing with the findings of the PMRA's comprehensive pesticide testing and re-evaluations. The minority, however, concluded that there is sufficient scientific evidence available for a province-wide ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides.

"In order to achieve the goals of reducing pesticide use throughout the province, and ensuring safe and proper use of approved products by unlicensed applicators, the Committee makes 17 recommendations that include restricting the sale and use of Commercial-class pesticides, improving enforcement of existing regulations, and strengthening training and public education related to pesticides use. The Committee recommends regulatory changes to: bolster retail rules, improve sales monitoring, and enhance the training of certified pesticide applicator and dispensers. The Committee also recommends strategies to increase public knowledge of safe pesticide use, to encourage golf courses to fully embrace the pillars of integrated pest management, and to develop a superior pesticide-return program."

So much for the report itself. I think it is excellent and obviously the most in depth such effort conducted any-where by any province. Bill Bennett and his fellow Liberal MLAs deserve great credit and congratulations!

I am told that those in opposition (groups such as the self-serving David Suzuki Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Society and all of the piddling little local groups who lead the opposition to "cosmetic" pesticides) are very upset and determined to fight even harder for a total ban. And, it goes without saying that if the NDP becomes the next government in B.C. come next May, a ban would be guaranteed. At the moment the NDP leads in the polls (50% vs. 23% for the Liberals), but B.C. has a complicated provincial political situation, made even more so recently with the appearance of a new Conservative party (19%). The Liberal party itself is a coalition of free enterprise people (Liberals and Conservatives) put together by Gordon Campbell and others in order to defeat the NDP in the provincial election of May 2001.

I'll leave that discussion for another time, or for someone else!

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