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Revelstoke Times Review

Cosmetics pesticides ban proposal gains momentum

By Aaron Orlando - Revelstoke Times Review

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The North Columbia Environmental Society's plans to have cosmetic pesticides banned from Revelstoke have gained support from a number of community groups and organizations over the past months.

So far the initiative has gained support from the Friends of Revelstoke & Glacier National Park, Revelstoke School District No. 19, Revelstoke Youth Soccer, the Illecillewaet Greenbelt Society and the Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club.

The NCES hosted two forums on the topic on April 16. The first presentation was to members of Revelstoke council and the later public evening presentation was held at the Revelstoke Community Centre.

The forums featured two speakers. The first presenter was physician Dr. Warren Bell who is the past founding president of the **Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment** (CAPE) and is the president of medical staff at Shuswap Lake General Hospital in Salmon Arm. The second presenter, Jerilynn Kiely, is a community action coordinator for the Interior of B.C. with the Canadian Cancer Society.

The Times Review attended the daytime presentation at the Revelstoke City Council Chambers.

Bell presented his thoughts on pesticides,

focusing on his perspective as a physician and also relating stories from his experiences working to have a ban enacted in Salmon Arm, as well as national-level activism on the subject with CAPE.

He defined cosmetic pesticides as those that are used for beautification, saying it did not include agricultural pesticides or those used for health or safety reasons.

Bell said that after WWII there was an explosion of new chemical pesticides based on the production of new synthetic molecules.

At the time, the new wonder chemicals were making short work of pests, and were put into a wide variety of uses. Although they proved to be effective at performing certain tasks, such as killing a specific unwanted insect or weed, Bell says adequate testing was never done to see what effects the chemicals had on other animals, including humans. He also said there was never adequate study on the cumulative effects the pesticides when combined with other pesticides or common everyday chemicals, giving bleach as an example.

“Somehow, we just didn’t get it,” says Bell. “We thought we could do all these things -- we could kill, we could do ... death and somehow it would just happen in the right place at the right time and everything else would be fine.

“As it turns out, the more we learn about especially new molecules, pesticides, the more we find out there is a problem.”

Bell reviewed a number of studies done over the past decades, and said that there is a correlation between increased pesticide uses and incidents of cancer.

He cited the Ontario College of Family Physicians’ ‘Pesticides Literature Review’ which was review of dozens of studies on pesticides, which he says at least 84 per cent of which showed a positive association between pesticides and cancers. “So the conclusion to the study, they took all the best studies, the more there was exposure the more there was cancer and the correlation with what

is what's called 'dose response curve.' More dose, more response. More pesticides, more cancer." he said. "And overall, the conclusion of this very large paper -- it's [about] 150 pages -- is essentially, the less you use pesticides, the better." The document can be accessed through a Google search for 'Pesticides Literature Review.'

Bell noted resistance he faced at the local and national level when working on cosmetic pesticides in the past.

Those with financial interest in the status quo come out against the cosmetic bans, says Bell, saying that organized national-level lobby selects local representatives to take up their cause at the community level. "They get the local people to do their shouting," he said. "They're off in the background feeding them paranoia." He also noted that a story on the subject in the local newspaper would likely draw a response in the form of a letter to the editor from pesticide lobby groups.

Bell feels that banning cosmetic pesticides aren't bad for the local economy. On the contrary, he notes that Canadian municipalities that have banned cosmetic pesticides (currently there are about 130) have experienced growth in businesses such as lawn care and garden maintenance.

He also said that there were opportunities for marketing pesticide-free municipalities. Revelstoke could attract those wanting to live in a pesticide-free community. He noted that he had talked to real estate agents who had fielded questions about pesticide use on residential properties.

Bell also felt that a pesticide-free golf course could be advertised to attract golfers interested in a healthy round, adding that there are many alternatives to synthetic pesticides. "There are lots of alternatives, but if you didn't ever know about them it'd be like 'Who the hell is going to come and play golf when weeds are choking [everything].'"

Bell, who spent years trying to convince local government in Salmon Arm to institute a cosmetic ban, says that a lack of awareness of alternatives, fears of the economic

consequences of the ban, and plain old status quo thinking led to the delay. "There's kind of a culture that goes along with using pesticides," he said. "[One spray and] you're done. You move on. As opposed to bending over and pulling it up, or as opposed to having a couple of other people to do more work."

He felt that once you raise awareness of the health issues and make alternatives available, eventually people realize the risks are not necessary.

Bell returned to his concerns about the health impacts of cosmetic pesticides and the many unknowns, again noting the upward trend in the occurrences of cancers in modern society. "None of the pesticides that are approved in Canada have ever been tested in combination with other pesticides," he said. "So, the toxic effect of one have never been tested in concert with the toxic effects of any other. In addition, none of them have ever been tested against the things that we use in our own environment, like chlorine bleach ... Nobody has even bothered to test it. It's known however, that we all have about between 40 and about 80 chemical residues in our body that we don't even know about."

Following Bell, Jerilynn Kiely of the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) presented the organization's views on cosmetic pesticides in a presentation called 'Pesticides and Cancer: Changing the way we think about lawns and gardens.'

Kiely said that the CCS is an evidence-based organization and bases their arguments on facts and statistics.

She again defined cosmetic pesticides as non-essential pesticides used to enhance the appearance of lawns and gardens, saying that a recent poll has shown that 77 per cent of British Columbians supported a cosmetic pesticide ban.

Kiely said the CCS believed that there is sufficient reason to want to take precautions.

She noted that children have increased health risks due to pesticide exposure. She cited a review that found children have a 2-3 times

increased risk of childhood leukaemia associated with childhood or pre-natal exposure to household or garden pesticides. She also noted that pets are vulnerable too, and often track pesticides into the home.

Kiely said the CCS was opposed to what is known as 'Integrated Pest Management' (IPM) which uses a combination of pesticides and other methods because it favoured pesticide use.

Bell said that when IPM was first introduced it was developed as a reaction to pesticide use, but he said that pro-pesticide lobby groups had subsequently influenced the program so that it was now pro-pesticide.

Kiely said the CCS supports a total cosmetic pesticide ban and favours safe, non-toxic alternatives and natural practices. She also noted that any effective ban of cosmetic pesticides at the municipal level would have to be backed up with an education campaign in order to be effective.

Kiely also noted that there were business opportunities at the local level that arise from a cosmetic pesticides ban, including new garden businesses, increased sales of non-toxic alternatives and an increased demand for an environmentally-friendly approach. Both Bell and Kiely said that bans on cosmetic pesticides could have a net benefit for the economy at the local level.

Natural alternatives include non-toxic chemicals such as vinegar, soap mixtures, encouraging beneficial insects, aerating the lawn, hand-pulling weeds and not mowing lawns very short.

About 20 people attended the evening meeting at the Revelstoke Community Centre.

Following the meeting, NCES president Sarah Newton said that the organization is continuing its efforts to have a cosmetic pesticides ban enacted in the municipality.

Newton said the next step would be to write a formal request to the City of Revelstoke's

Environmental Advisory Committee asking for an immediate stop to pesticide spraying on all city fields including the Queen Elizabeth Park field, the track field and the city baseball diamonds. "Since School District No. 19 and Revelstoke Youth Soccer both support a full ban we would like these areas completely free of pesticides immediately," she wrote.

She said following that, the organization would likely once again approach the city's environmental committee and ask for a sub-committee to be formed to research and draft a cosmetic pesticide ban plan to be presented to Revelstoke City Council.

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