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Surrey North Delta Leader

Address pesticides: Mayor

By Jeff Nagel - Surrey North Delta Leader

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Earlier this month, the City of Burnaby unanimously called on city staff to bring forward a bylaw banning the cosmetic use of pesticides.

When adopted, Burnaby will have joined Vancouver, North Vancouver City and District, Maple Ridge, New Westminster, West Vancouver, Port Moody and a dozen other B.C. municipalities in enacting such legislation.

The City of Surrey was asked last week to consider similar regulations, and has referred the issue to its Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) and asked staff to review some of this region's bylaws.

Mayor Dianne Watts said it's time to address the issue.

"It's about time we took this issue seriously," Watts said. "It's not rocket science to know that when you spray chemicals, there's an effect."

If adopted immediately, Surrey would become the 225th municipality in the country to pass such legislation.

Last Monday, six Kwantlen Polytechnic University outlined for Surrey council the dangers of the cancer-causing chemicals people are spraying on their lawns and gardens. The students were looking for a ban on cosmetic use (which only serves to beautify a lawn or garden). The students also briefly noted the far-reaching impacts on the environment.

In fact, only last month, a study was published in Environmental Science and Technology showing trout were losing their sense of smell when exposed to pesticide levels modelled after those found in the Nicomekl River.

"This study demonstrates that environmentally observed pesticide mixtures can injure salmon olfactory tissue, and by extension, contribute to the threatened and endangered status of many salmon stocks," the research team wrote in the paper titled, "Salmon Olfaction is Impaired by an Environmentally Realistic Pesticide Mixture."

The study indicates a damaged sense of smell could hinder the salmon from finding their spawning area and

could keep them from detecting predators.

David Suzuki biologist David Werring said Thursday he'd be interested in the long-term effects on the salmon.

He said such chemicals are having wholesale impacts on salmon including "their olfaction, their ability to feed, impacts on their ability to spawn, so there are myriad factors."

Watts said she wants a carefully planned recommendation regarding any cosmetic pesticide ban, which would be developed by all affected stakeholders.

She also said she wanted the issue referred to the Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) as well as the EAC.

However, key members of both those committees have already expressed they aren't keen on such legislation.

EAC Chair Bill Stilwell told The Leader he's already heard the arguments for a ban, and doesn't see what's changed. And the council representative on the AAC said he was reticent to look at a ban. Coun. Marvin Hunt noted that a DDT ban increased mosquito populations in Africa causing thousands of deaths by malaria.

Jim McMurtry, who has been asking for a ban of cosmetic use of pesticides for a dozen years and is now running for a seat on Surrey council, said he'll be making it an election issue this fall.

Delta doesn't have a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides, but Mayor Lois Jackson thinks its a great idea, and will bring it forward to her council in the coming months.

The province also weighed in on the issue in reaction to the Kwantlen presentation to Surrey council.

Local NDP MLAs are renewing their call to the Gordon Campbell government to set down strong regulations regarding pesticides in this province.


"Through strong research and activism these students have shown incredible leadership in their plight to ban cosmetic pesticides," said Sue Hammell, NDP MLA for Surrey-Green Timbers. "It's time the Campbell government showed some leadership and passed legislation to protect the health and safety of British Columbians and our environment."

As of this year, the Surrey Board of Education no longer uses herbicides or pesticides on school properties.

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