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Dinosaurs are in our gardens

BY TODD MAJOR, SPECIAL TO NORTH SHORE NEWS AUGUST 24, 2011



Baking soda used to control powdery mildew on plants such as roses is a cost effective and eco-friendly alternative to cosmetic pesticides that contaminate surface and ground water through runoff.

Photograph by: Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

Some people call me a ranter with nothing better to do than criticize all that is good with the world.

Let's consider what some people consider "right in the world" as related to the world of gardening and the environment. What's right to some people means spraying millions of metric tons annually of poisonous pesticides to kill helpless dandelions and pencil-head-sized aphids so we can all massage our collective vanity.

At a municipal council meeting I attended elsewhere in the Lower Mainland (not on the North Shore) I gave a presentation to council on the merits of implementing a cosmetic pesticide bylaw. As soon as I started talking, several council members and some bureaucrats (read: dinosaurs), gazed upon me dismissively, rolling their eyes in boredom, staring at the ceiling or shuffling papers as if to look busy with matters more important than what I was talking about.

I guess public health is not important to dinosaurs. And I suppose that if you like your children and pets picking up residual amounts of poisonous pesticides sprayed on the lawn and garden, then banning cosmetic pesticides is not important to you.

Fine, old man -- be that way. Now don't get me wrong, I am not against old men or old women. As a matter of fact, my wife is older than I am and I like her just fine. I'm just fed up with dinosaurs that lack the judgment and vision to change the status quo for society's betterment. But I digress.

So after I finished my talk, I sat patiently in the audience for two hours waiting for council to come to the issue of approving a mere public discussion on pesticides or even considering a pesticide bylaw. Council in their infinite wisdom decided that a cosmetic pesticide bylaw was too difficult to enforce and

that without surrounding municipalities also implementing similar bylaws, that a patchwork of municipal policy was not good public policy.

I should have known it was a foregone conclusion before I even stepped in the room. Enforcing cosmetic pesticide bylaws is no more difficult than enforcing smoking in public, cutting down trees or any other bylaw that requires enforcement. Tough is never easy but it still has to get done.

In my mind, any council's reasons for not implementing a strong cosmetic pesticide bylaw come down to one thing -- "Dinosaurism," which is defined as: A state of mind preoccupied with keeping the status quo because of narcissistic benefit, fear of change, lack of advanced intellectual faculty or no vision; often associated with old, outdated thinking from the 1950s or earlier, and accompanied by excessive amounts of procedural requirement.

Anyone who thinks that we are not being fed a constant diet of sexy, targeted, proactive marketing aimed at keeping us all hooked on garden fertilizers and pesticides is naive. If you think it's bad in Canada, look to the United States where cities are not even allowed to ban pesticides due to state and federal jurisdictions prohibiting such laws. And American dinosaurs are as useless as Canadian dinosaurs.

All three North Shore municipalities have implemented some form of cosmetic pesticide bylaws, even though their laws contain exemptions for golf course and others. I fail to understand why a golf course is allowed to spray poisons into the environment just so golfers can walk on pristinely weed free grass. Talk about a failed value system. But I digress.

So we are left with an ever-growing volume of research from scientists and doctors around the world that indicates we are loading our environment with a growing cocktail of poisonous pesticides that are linked to a range of serious diseases, long term health problems and genetic mutations in newborn babies. These poisons end up in our ground water supplies and the food we eat. But I forgot, dinosaurs don't understand bio-accumulation, as a matter of fact dinosaurs think environmentalists invented bio-accumulation.

There are many options available to grow the garden sustainably. These ideas are not difficult or expensive, they just take some personal effort and responsibility. Regardless of bylaws, change requires the will to change and effort on the part of each person to affect change. Since the dinosaurian municipal bylaws for pesticides lack teeth and can't restrict the sale of pesticides -- only the provincial government can restrict product sales -- it's time to take our concerns to the provincial level.

If you want the provincial government to implement a province-wide cosmetic pesticide law, send your comments via email to Dr. Terry Lake, B.C. Environment Minister at Env.Minister@gov.bc.ca or Premier Christy Clark at Premier@gov.bc.ca. And remember that chemical companies are currently lobbying the government to prevent any proposed pesticide legislation from affecting profit margins. So be part of the solution not the problem.

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