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Report recommends tightening use of pesticides

Stephen Llewellyn

A new wellness report is calling for the provincial government to get tough on cosmetic pesticide use, second-hand smoke and tobacco products aimed at children.

But the report stops short of recommending a complete ban on pesticides.

"The citizens of New Brunswick are very concerned about the use of pesticides," said Chris Collins, Liberal MLA for Moncton East and chairman of the legislature's select committee on wellness.

The all-party committee was created in the February 2007 provincial throne speech and held public meetings across the province this year.

In its final report released Friday, the committee made 49 recommendations.

Collins said when it comes to pesticides, the committee isn't recommending an absolute ban, but isn't ruling out such a ban, either.

He said the Liberal government is working on new regulations that will control pesticides.

"The government will be tabling something in the next session of the legislature," said Collins.

Jack Wetmore, a former director of Landscape New Brunswick and former operator of Wetmore's Landscaping, Sod and Nursery in Lower St. Marys, said Friday that a ban on pesticides won't work.

"It cannot be practically enforced," he said. "They are finding that in Quebec."

Pesticides are being sold into Quebec from Edmundston, said Wetmore.

Wetmore said the pesticides and insecticides approved for use in Canada are safe when used properly. The key is to educate the public to ensure they're used properly, he said.

He said when the new legislation is introduced, it should put a strong emphasis on continuing public education.

Since 2000, the amount of pesticides used in New Brunswick has decreased 50 per cent and the amount of insecticides used has decreased 20 per cent, said Wetmore. Considering the increase in the number of lawns being treated in New Brunswick, the overall use is probably down 75 per cent per lawn, he said.

Wetmore also said New Brunswick is near the bottom of the pesticide usage scale in Canada, according to Statistics Canada.

The wellness report refers to the 2004 Ontario College of Family Physician's pesticide literature review. But Wetmore said that report was scientifically flawed and has since been refuted.

"It is most unfortunate that got embedded in that report," he said. "I am most disappointed. There is a lot of flawed science that goes into some of the submissions that go into these kinds of

recommendations."

Another recommendation in the report calls on the government to renew efforts to prevent and reduce tobacco use and enhance protection from second-hand tobacco smoke.

New Brunswick has already banned smoking in public buildings, restaurants and bars.

But Collins said more needs to be done in areas such as smoking in cars and near the entrances of public places.

"We still smell smoke," he said. "We are still affected by smoke when we go outside."

The report calls on the government to particularly restrict tobacco products that are attractive to children.

"Children were identified (as being) among the most vulnerable to media advertising," states the report. "It was suggested that government restrict tobacco marketing to children by regulating and restricting new tobacco products such as cigarillos and snus."

The Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada group is also recommending that kid-friendly flavourings for tobacco be banned, noted the report.

Other recommendations include looking for ways to make healthy food more affordable, make workplace wellness a priority, increase physical education instruction to 150 minutes a week at all grade levels, and require a Grade 12 physical education credit for graduation.