Over the Limit

Video shows BC Ministry of Forests Spraying Pesticides in Wind on Salt Spring Island

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In the early morning of Monday May 6th, BC's Ministry of Forests aerial sprayed the insecticide Foray 48B over a residential area and a creek on Salt Spring Island in wind speeds that contravene the province's Integrated Pest Management Act, the federal Pest Control Products Act, and the conditions of the Pesticide Use Permit it holds.

BC law prohibits aerial spraying of pesticides in winds greater than 8 km/h. Weather station data for Salt Spring shows wind speeds of 18 km/h at the time spraying occurred, between 6:00 and 6:19 am. This video footage https://vimeo.com/944605634/53a099bae5?share=copy taken from the north end of St Mary Lake in the early morning of May 6 shows the plane flying overhead and discharging pesticides just above the south edge of the lake. It also shows waves breaking, whitecaps, and trees and branches constantly moving in the wind, consistent with wind speeds of 19 to 28 km/h using the Beaufort Windscale https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/general-marine-weather-information/understanding-forecasts/beaufort-wind-scale-table.html.

As well as releasing pesticides in the wind while on the south edge of St. Mary Lake, which provides drinking water to 1400 homes, the plane also sprayed directly over Duck Creek. Provincial regulations require that protection be taken to ensure that pesticide spray or runoff do not enter water used for domestic or agricultural use. The safety data sheet for Foray 48B provided by its manufacturer, Valent Bioscience, https://www.valentbiosciences.com/foresthealth/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2024/03/SDS-VBC-0244R4-Foray-48B-CANADA-02-23-2024.pdf cautions that the product and its runoff should be kept out of drains, sewers, ditches and waterways. Its ecotoxity data (based on a concentrated powder) states: "do not allow into waterways or lakes." The product label states: "Apply only when meteorological conditions are in compliance with local and/or provincial authorities" and that: "It is an offence under the Pest Control Products Act to use this product in a way that is inconsistent with the directions of the label."

Monday's aerial spraying was a part of the province's spongy moth control program. Last year, the Ministry of Forests conducted high density trapping in the area now being sprayed on Salt Spring and found 14 spongy moths. According to information on the province's Spongy Moth News website: "The 2023 high-density trapping program completed on Salt Spring Island was successful". https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/forestry/managing-our-forest-resources/forest-health/invasive-forest-pests/spongy-moth/news

Salt Spring community members have asked the Ministry to defer aerial spraying and allow residents to coordinate and implement other potentially more effective, less risky and invasive methods for addressing the spongy moth, such as pheromone-baited trapping and volunteer-driven egg eradication. Similar and successful non-invasive programs have been conducted in the communities of Sidney, Gabriola Island and South Duncan. BC government treatment information https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/forestry/managing-our-forest-resources/forest-health/invasive-forest-pests/spongy-moth/spongy-moth-treatments states that: "mass trapping can be used as a treatment in small areas with good access for setting up traps." The 48-hectare residential neighbourhood now being sprayed on Salt Spring matches these criteria. At least two more aerial pesticide sprayings are scheduled for the Salt Spring neighbourhood this month, with the next tentatively taking place on May 16th.

Although the spraying of waterways contravenes Foray 48B product safety requirements, in a phone call Monday with concerned resident Oona McOuat, BC Forest Health Officer Tim Ebata said that spraying the waterway Duck Creek was "inconsequential". He also said that although he personally thought it was too windy to spray, they had "their own wind measurement tools" that showed it was safe. Documented weather station data and video footage taken at the time of spraying, which show wind speeds of 18 km/h or more, prove it was not.