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London bans **pesticides**

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The 13-6 vote, after a two-hour debate, allows exemptions such as sports fields and farms.

By JOE BELANGER, FREE PRESS CITY HALL REPORTER

Armstrong lauded over pesticide ban

In two years, Londoners won't be allowed to kill their dandelions -- or any other weeds -- with **pesticides**.

Sensing the political winds in an election year, city council voted 13-6 last night in favour of a bylaw banning the cosmetic use of **pesticides**.

The bylaw takes effect in September 2008, giving industry and residents three growing seasons to adjust.

"It's the right thing to do," said an elated Coun. Bill Armstrong, who led the push for a bylaw.

Two key issues to be resolved are how the bylaw will be enforced and the breadth of a public education campaign.

City staff estimate enforcement will cost up to \$300,000 a year, while an education campaign could cost \$300,000 -- nearly \$1 million over three years.

Last night's vote came after a two-hour debate with most council members speaking.

Council first voted on a series of four proposed amendments, including one calling for a total ban. The only one that passed was an exemption for playing fields and lawn bowling centres proposed by Coun. Cheryl Miller.

"It was that one final compromise to make it a good majority of councillors to pass the bylaw," said Sean Hurley, spokesperson for the Coalition Against **Pesticides** in London. "I think they've made a good decision. It's a good bylaw."

Other exemptions in the bylaw -- mostly a blend of bylaws passed in Toronto and Peterborough -- include golf courses, farms, swimming pools, utility rights of way and for threats to human health and insect infestations.

John Matsui, spokesperson for the lawn-care industry, said he wasn't surprised by the vote.

"It's clear Imagine London is in control of the majority of city council and they're to be congratulated," Matsui said.

"That's what London should get used to."

Sam **Trosow**, the driving force behind the citizens' group Imagine London, which also successfully appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board for a new 14-ward electoral system, said he's happy with the bylaw, except the phase-in. "But it's a real victory for those of us working for a meaningful bylaw for London."

The debate was mostly civil, but Deputy Mayor Tom Gosnell raised eyebrows when he described council's pro-ban members as "idealogues."

"I hear a lot of opinions, but don't see a lot of facts," Gosnell said. "We've heard just a lot of people scare-mongering. You have to have evidence and you have to have empirical evidence."

Gosnell echoed the lawn-care industry's position that scientists at Health Canada and similar agencies around the world have approved **pesticides** for use, including 2,4-D, the main herbicide used by the lawn-care industry, saying they pose an acceptable risk if used as directed.

Ban supporters concede there's little or no scientific evidence showing a direct link between pesticide use and health issues, but argue banning cosmetic use of the materials is needed as a precaution because of casual links and associations between various ailments and **pesticides**.

Council defeated a bylaw last November that would have allowed spraying of **pesticides** on up to 20 per cent of a property owner's lawn, reducing that to 10 per cent by 2010.

But the debate was renewed in the wake of a poll by the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment that found 74 per cent of Londoners favoured phasing out **pesticides**.

"I think that poll really helped make council realize we do have public support," said **Trosow**.

Meanwhile, council began to feel the pressure as political observers warned the pesticide issue was emerging as a major issue for the Nov. 13 election.

Laura Wall, manager of the Elgin-Middlesex unit of the cancer society, was pleased.

"We recognized the weight that poll would carry, and that's why we worked so hard the last four or five months to answer questions for council and the public," Wall said, adding the group will now shift focus to the public information campaign.

HOW COUNCIL MEMBERS VOTED

- In favour of a pesticide ban: Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco, Controller Gord Hume and councillors Fred Tranquilli, Bernie MacDonald, David Winninger, Susan Eagle, Sandy White, Judy Bryant, Ab Chahbar, Cheryl Miller, Joni Baechler, Bill Armstrong and Harold Usher.

- Opposed: Deputy Mayor Tom Gosnell, controllers Bud Polhill and Russ Monteith and councillors Roger Caranci, Rob Alder and Paul Van Meerbergen