

# Edmonton council urged to curb pesticide use

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Some citizens are urging Edmonton to curb pesticide and herbicide use, citing health problems. (EDMONTON SUN/File)

City council got an earful from citizens on both sides of the pesticide debate Monday.

About a dozen people spoke out in favour of introducing a bylaw that would limit pesticide use, responding to a report from administration that updated the city's use of pesticides through its Integrated Pest Management policy.

Sheryl McCumsey brought a petition with 1,200 signatures from Albertans who want new bylaws in place. She said she has gone to police, the city, and Alberta Health with concerns that her neighbour is "constantly" spraying the herbicide Roundup on his property, but has not received help because there is no bylaw.

McCumsey claims herself and her daughter have experienced symptoms of herbicide poisoning, which include nausea, diarrhea and respiratory issues.

She said many who signed her petition had more serious health problems, such as cancer, that they blame partly on excessive pesticide use.

"This is heartbreaking," McCumsey said.

Dr. Raquel Feroe advocated for a bylaw against cosmetic use of non-essential pesticides, citing "serious, well-documented health concerns."

Bylaw advocates said using natural weed-control methods — like vinegar, boiling water or pulling — is better for soil in the long term and would eventually save the city money.

"I think there is a lot of collective knowledge and expertise," Feroe said.

"Red Deer and other closeby jurisdictions have models that could be used."

Coun. Scott McKeen sympathized with their concerns, but noted many Edmontonians are vocal about wanting their weeds removed as quickly as possible.

He questioned whether the proposed natural methods of weed elimination would be quick and cost-effective.

"If there's any dandelions out there, the phones are ringing here, and they're ringing off the hook," McKeen said.

The city currently has a number of herbicide-free parks, and prohibits herbicide use within 30 metres of daycares or play spaces as well school zones from September through June.

Weed Man manager Lori Heidt said she supports the city's current pesticide policy.

"We, as an industry, are always evolving and striving for a better way to conduct business," she said.

"Our city's policy regarding IPM is a prime example of how far we have come."

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