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Organic activist to weigh in on pesticide debate

Documentary to be shown Monday

By [Jim Haug](#) Herald staff writer

Paul Tukey, a promoter of organic lawn care who has supported restrictive ordinances on pesticides across North America, will weigh in on a proposed city ordinance to limit synthetic pesticides in Durango parks and other city-owned property.

Tukey, founder of Safelawns.org and author of The Organic Lawn Care Manual, will present his documentary, "A Chemical Reaction," on Monday at the Smiley Building. The reception will begin at 6 p.m., followed by the film screening at 7 p.m. and a discussion at 8:15 p.m.

Tukey also said he plans to speak at a public hearing about the proposed ordinance during the regular City Council meeting, which will begin at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Supported by a local citizens group called Organically Managed Parks Team Durango, the ordinance would encourage the city to use organic lawn care whenever possible and limit the use of chemical treatments.

City officials, lawn-care companies and supporters of the Hillcrest Golf Course and playing fields have either opposed or expressed skepticism about exclusively relying on organics, citing the cost and lack of need for organics.

The costs for maintaining city parks could increase from \$34,550 to \$237,450 annually and from \$8,000 to \$76,700 annually for maintaining the city's natural lands, said Cathy Metz, director of the city's parks and recreation department. The cost increases are based on the city having to rely on manual or mechanical removal of weeds and having to apply organic fertilizer monthly.

Opponents also argue that no one has gotten sick in Durango from pesticides and that the cities that tried organic lawn care have returned to using synthetics.

In a phone interview, Tukey said opposition is based on the "fear of the unknown" and reluctance to learn alternative methods of lawn care.

Landscapers don't have to work "harder, just smarter," he said.

He said organic methods become cheaper through time because of efficiencies. He argues that many "cosmetic" pesticides to remove dandelions and clover leaf are unnecessary anyway.

“No one has ever tripped over a dandelion,” he said.

Tukey said anyone older than 45 grew up playing on organically treated fields because synthetic pesticides were not introduced until the mid-1970s.

Because of the prevalence of childhood cancer and rising rates of autism and attention deficit disorders, Tukey said it’s ignorant to think children are not getting sick from pesticides.

As a former landscaper with a lawn-care company, Tukey said he became sick from the pesticides he was using.

Because of the dangers, he said most of Canada and the states of New York and Connecticut have limited the use of chemical treatments for playing fields and other public lands.

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