

Committee discusses Regina pesticide ban

BY TERENCE MCEACHERN, LEADER-POST MARCH 2, 2012

REGINA -- Regina could see a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides in the near future.

On Thursday, The Environment Advisory Committee (EAC) voted to work on a recommendation banning the cosmetic use of pesticides, first by the municipality on its own green spaces and then city-wide for private individuals.

The EAC's working group will report back to the committee April 5, ideally with a time line on when the policy should be implemented and when the policy should be forwarded to the city's Public Works Committee.

Committee member Coun. Fred Clipsham (Ward 3) suggested that a longer term plan, for example five years, would be better received by city council when the matter comes for a vote.

Anything significantly shorter could jeopardize the initiative, especially when opposition from various industries such as landscaping and retail stores arise.

"To convey a sense of urgency, I think is important. To overdo it, I think you risk losing it," said Clipsham.

The committee also debated when to bring the recommendation forward, noting that the Oct. 24 municipal election could result in a "brand new council who may not want anything to do with this," said one committee member, adding the recommendation should come before the election and coincide with the city's budget discussions.

Pesticides for cosmetic purposes, mainly involving herbicides that kill weeds, are used to improve the appearance of green spaces such as lawns and gardens, explained Neil Vandendort, director of Parks and Open Spaces for the city. This is different from other forms of pesticides, namely insecticides, that control mosquito populations and protect trees from Dutch Elm disease.

The city has been discussing implementing a pesticide policy since 2003. To date, other provinces, including New Brunswick, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Ontario and Alberta have legislation either banning the cosmetic use of pesticides or products that contain herbicides.

Since 2010, a city project has designated three parks - Gordon Park, Al Pickard Park and Queen Elizabeth II Court - as pesticide free. The EAC is expected to recommend to city council before the summer whether that project will continue for another year. If so, an extension could involve the same three parks or additional green spaces in the city.

The Regina unit of the Canadian Cancer Society supports both the extension of the project and the city-wide ban on cosmetic pesticide use.

"There's very strong scientific evidence linking pesticide exposure to different lung diseases, not just cancers," said Sanela Begic-Le, cancer control coordinator with the society.

Last year, for pesticide products and labour, the city spent about \$500,000 for mosquito control, \$115,000 gopher control, \$115,000 fighting Canker Worms, \$100,000 for Dutch Elm disease, \$70,000 on weed control. The numbers vary from year to year depending on the weather, he said.

Vandendort said banning cosmetic pesticides would not save the city money because fertilizer and aeration measures would have to increase to accommodate.

"Really, it becomes more labour intensive, so, likely, the cost will go up," he said.

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