

Calgary to reduce pesticide usage; moves not enough, critics say

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 17, 2009



The city is moving ahead with a bylaw to reduce the use of pesticides, with a final draft to be brought forward in December.

Photograph by: Tyler Brownbridge, Windsor Star

CALGARY - Critics and some aldermen say the city has further weakened its pesticide bylaw after council voted Monday not to move forward on targets for eliminating herbicide use.

"We choked on that. We removed the target," said Ald. Brian Pincott, who already believed the bylaw didn't go far enough.

"I've worked long and hard towards making Calgary a safer place.

"I felt like we had that in our grasp."

Green groups who already felt the city was contemplating a weak bylaw were further disappointed.

"A bylaw that does not keep pesticides out of our water, air and our soil is a weak bylaw," said Natalie Odd, executive director of Green Calgary, which used to be called Clean Calgary.

But other aldermen who voted against the clause relating to targets said there were concerns about being able to enforce a ban, especially on private property.

"It's a ban by increments," Ald. Gord Lowe said.

And Ald. John Mar said a complete ban would have "unintended consequences."

He said there are too many unanswered questions, including the effect on golf courses and how much control council can have over private property.

"Most important, how is this enforced?" he said. "We're creating something unenforceable."

Overall, council gave the go-ahead in a 13-2 vote to develop a bylaw reducing herbicide use. Ald. Linda Fox-Mellway and Ald. Joe Connelly were opposed.

It will come back to the utilities and environment committee -- which held a lengthy hearing on the issue in October--early next month, when the public will again have an opportunity to comment.

It must then also return to council.

The principles that will now be part of the bylaw include banning products that are over-used, such as those that require dilution and any that are sprayed over a large area rather than applied to specific spots.

A system to notify neighbours that a pesticide has been used will also be developed.

And there will be increased standards for those licensed to apply the chemicals, such as lawn care companies.

"We struck the right balance," Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said.

"Some people didn't feel we went far enough. Others think we went too far."

During the October hearings, the committee heard that the province's decision to ban weed and feed products will help to reduce the amount of herbicide that ends up in the city's water.

It also heard from many people with varying opinions on the safety of herbicides people use on their lawns.

Calgary is the biggest city in Canada without comprehensive anti-herbicide rules.

kguttormson@theherald.canwest.com

© Copyright (c) The Calgary Herald