

Pesticide plan hits right balance

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City council has found some rare middle ground that will reduce pesticide use while still allowing spot spraying.

The bylaw still needs to be written, but administration now has clear direction. What's out is an outright ban. As proven in other municipalities, bans on the use of pesticides don't work because they are unenforceable, short of creating property police to patrol lawns.

The new rules call for tougher licensing standards for commercial lawn-care companies, the reduction or ban of herbicides that must be diluted, and those that are intended to be used over large areas.

The Coalition for a Healthy Calgary believes short of a ban, the bylaw is toothless. This position fails to acknowledge Alberta will become only the second province to ban the sale of combination fertilizer and herbicide products come Jan. 1, 2010. That renders municipal bans on usage unnecessary. As long as the products are available for purchase, no municipal ban will stop some people from using them on their lawns.

Banning the sale is what really works. Products that combine fertilizer with herbicide, are among the biggest culprits of the whole debate. Weed and feed products are often over-applied, with the excess chemical washing into the storm drainage system and polluting our waterways.

Lawn care companies and other commercial users of pesticides point out these products, when used correctly, are not unsafe. But they are rarely used correctly by individual property owners.

Council has planted the seeds for a workable bylaw that should create business for the professionals and reduce toxic chemicals in our environment, without choking the rights of homeowners.

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