

Bylaw draft says city will fine individuals, not companies for heavy pesticide use

BY JASON MARKUSOFF, CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 27, 2009 7:02 PM



A display of pesticides that will soon be banned in Ontario sits on display at the Home Hardware store in Tecumseh on Tuesday, March 17, 2009.

Photograph by: Tyler Brownbridge, Windsor Star

CALGARY- Calgary will limit the heavy spraying of pesticides by individuals but exempt professionally licensed applicators, according to a newly released draft bylaw that aldermen will consider Wednesday.

It sets out \$150 fines for individuals who don't follow the new rules and up to \$500 for licensed officials who don't keep proper records. But the city's bylaw division has already warned the bylaw will be tough to enforce and wouldn't even start a public-education campaign in earnest until a year after the rules take effect in January.

"The only shock is that it's going to be even more minimal than we thought," said the Canadian Cancer Society's Evie Rodway.

"The impact is going to be very minimal, so Calgarians can't expect a big difference."

Calgary is the largest city Canadian without a comprehensive bylaw governing pesticide use. Many municipalities have full ban on non-essential or "cosmetic" use of the yard chemicals, but Calgary is taking a softer approach.

Companies like Green Drop and Weed Man have said they follow best practises to avoid overuse of pesticides. Ald. Linda Fox-Mellway said it's not the professionals the bylaw wants to target, but ordinary citizens.

"People don't know how to use this stuff," said Fox-Mellway, chairwoman of the committee that will hold another public hearing Wednesday to help shape the debate.

"The guys trained in using this know not to broadly spray. They know how to use this stuff — it's money to them."

The last public hearing on Calgary's pesticide bylaw endured late in the night, with various industry and anti-pesticide speakers as well as a Health Canada official, who noted that his agency rigorously tests the chemical products to ensure they're not harmful when used properly. This week's meeting will be the last chance for public input before the final bylaw is crafted.

Earlier this month, council voted to reject a motion calling for city to gradually move toward a fuller pesticide ban, with many aldermen saying tougher rules would be virtually unenforceable on private property.

Ald. Joe Ceci is holding out hopes that colleagues minds will change on a bylaw he said is too weak. "I don't see how it's going to address the real health concerns people have expressed to me about pesticides in Calgary," Ceci said.

Calgary's proposals would take effect Jan. 1, the same day as the province begins banning sale of all weed-and-feed products.

Individuals who aren't licensed to use pesticides would be barred from using hose-end spray chemicals and any that require dilution, but can still spot-spray pests or weeds. Anyone who gets paid to apply pesticides will need a licence, keep records and post notices for at least a day after using the chemical treatments.

The bylaw also doesn't impose a crackdown on pesticide use on city-owned parks or sports fields. The city has tried limiting its chemical use through an integrated pest management plan, and last year cut its herbicide use to 981 kilograms, down 80 per cent over the previous year's levels.

City administration won't spend any extra money in 2010 on public awareness around pesticides or enforcement, but is requesting \$500,000 for programs in 2011.

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