

Parks less green without pesticides

BY WILL VERBOVEN, FOR THE CALGARY HERALD MAY 26, 2010

Re: "Pesticides mean city parks not so green," Opinion, May 20.

In her column, Adrienne Beattie is right about one thing, our parks will not be so green anymore, instead they will become more yellow, purple, red and brown because of increasing infestations of dandelions, thistles, nettles and a host of other noxious weeds. Those who are affected by pollens and airborne seed allergens can look forward to more misery thanks to those folks who want to create an organic, free range green jungle in Calgary.

It's always amusing to see that old saw horse dragged out about how other cities have banned pesticides so Calgary needs to keep up with that politically correct trend. What's left out is that there is not a shred of evidence that those places that banned cosmetic herbicides (the word pesticide tends to be a misnomer in this case, but it has a more fearmongering sound to it) are any healthier or have reduced rates of cancer. And don't hold your breath any honest studies will be done, lobby groups don't want that unwelcome information.

Perhaps Beattie complains too much as it appears she is unaware that the battle has been won. The province has banned the use of weed and feed and most large retail outlets no longer sell products with 2,4-D, the most commonly used broadleaf weed killer. It would seem, based on the annual appearance of vast fields of yellow on city property, that herbicides are not being applied all that much anymore. I would suggest that the use of lawn weed killers was never very high, so it was an easy political target for publicity hungry green zealots and vote-seeking aldermen.

Even though common sense is long lost with this issue, hope is breaking out. Some of the municipalities and provinces that have enacted pesticide bans are coming to their senses on blanket bans. They came to the realization that "pesticide ban" is too broad a term because it can legally include every toxic substance used to control any living thing. That means no pesticide could be used to control insect and rodent infestations. No products could be used to control spiders and ants in your house and garden. Infestations of thistles and brush that are taking over Nose Hill Park could not be controlled. Wiser aldermen on Calgary city council seem to understand that and a new bylaw with common-sense exemptions is being considered.

Curiously, Beattie agonizes over the risks of pesticide use to reduced nitrogen fixation and soil depletion; those agronomy matters probably baffle most city folks, which I expect is what she intended. Those of us who have studied soil science would be amused by such an allegation, being that modern agricultural production has reached massive increases in productivity and soil stability thanks to the appropriate use of pesticides and fertilizers.

Beattie takes the usual green tactic to demonize any issue by using infamous weasel words like "linked" -- a term beloved by spin doctors. Did you know that the horrors and human suffering caused by cancer can all be linked to mother's milk -- it's true! I suspect most consumers are getting tired of outlandish allegations constantly being shovelled on the public as alleged truths by green lobby groups.

Now that Beattie and her fellow eco-warriors have mortally wounded the pesticide dragon, perhaps they need a new more insidious target. It's been suggested that the most serious threat to the environment is the use of power mowers to cut grass, particularly the smoke-belching ones used by the city. Did you know they are linked to destroying the ozone layer, increasing the suicide rate of noise-averse citizens, causing impotence in lawn mower drivers, and worst of all, affecting the self-esteem of plants whose desire to grow freely is constantly being cut back? Where are those self-righteous aldermen and citizens when you really need them? They should be throwing themselves in front of every power mower in the city to stop this horrendous practice. We can only hope.

Will Verboven is editor of Alberta Farmer, Alberta's largest-circulation agricultural publication.

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