

## Residents urge Costa Mesa to eliminate local use of synthetic pesticides

By LUKE MONEY

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Some residents in and around Costa Mesa want the city to end the use of synthetic pesticides citywide. (File Photo)

About a dozen people who live in and around Costa Mesa urged the City Council on Tuesday to eliminate the use of synthetic pesticides citywide, citing concerns about potential health effects.

The residents made their pleas during a council study session to review the city's pest management plan, which essentially guides local weed- and pest-control strategies.

Of particular concern for those at the meeting was the use of glyphosate, a common herbicide that some agencies have labeled a possible carcinogen. It is the primary ingredient in the weed killer Roundup.

Though the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said in December that there was no evidence the chemical causes cancer, the assessment contradicted other conclusions from California regulators and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, which is part of the World Health Organization.

"We have it under the assumption that if a pesticide is on the market, then it must be safe. However, the findings of emerging science indicate the opposite," Costa Mesa resident Vanessa Armstrong told the council. "Pesticides are far from safe. Do you remember DDT and 'Big Tobacco?' These were proven carcinogenic after many lives were lost."

Armstrong and several others at the meeting are members of Non Toxic Costa Mesa, a residents group that is urging the city to stop the use of non-organic pesticides.

Public Services Director Raja Sethuraman said the city in recent years has "been working on how we can minimize pesticides in our parks and facilities."

Citywide use of glyphosate has decreased by about 85% since the 2013-14 fiscal year, according to staff, and has been replaced with organic materials and increased use of mulch to prevent weeds from sprouting in planters and tree wells.

Sethuraman said Costa Mesa's pest management plan "guides the city to use the least harmful pesticides and weed management and control strategies" while ensuring that parks, sports fields and other facilities are well-maintained.

"We are integrating organic [products] where it's feasible," he said. "We totally want to eliminate some of the products like glyphosate where it's possible."

Other Orange County cities have taken similar steps — or gone further. Irvine prioritizes organic compounds and manual or mechanical weeding on city property, while San Juan Capistrano uses only organic materials to treat weeds in its parks.

Sethuraman said Costa Mesa could follow those cities' leads but that doing so may increase annual landscape maintenance costs by \$230,000 to \$360,000. Councilwoman Katrina Foley said she would like the city to adopt a policy similar to Irvine's, calling it a "no-brainer." The estimated additional costs, she said, would be worth it "to make our community safer" and healthier.

Mayor Sandy Genis said she "would not want to take anything out of the arsenal entirely," adding that any additional costs should be looked at with consideration of recent projections showing the city could face budget deficits in coming years.

"In the context of our overall budget, it's not enormous, but we have probably 100 other things that also aren't enormous, so we're all going to have to think what are our priorities, where do we go from here," she said.

Four council members were at Tuesday's meeting. Councilman Jim Righeimer was absent.

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