

Support to ban spraying dries up City council votes today on pesticides

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A plan to make Calgary pesticide-free is expected to wither on the vine today, as a divided council heads into a vote on the issue.

Proponents of a ban on the cosmetic use of weed-killing toxins say they're bracing for a tough battle in council chambers.

"I'm always hopeful. Certainly the majority of Calgarians want to see a ban on non-essential use -- but I think council is divided," said Ald. Druh Farrell, one of three aldermen advocating for a pesticide-free city.

Last month, the utilities and environment committee approved proceeding with a bylaw that would restrict the use of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides on public land and private lawns by 2011.

But a poll of aldermen reveals many are opposed to such a plan.

Ald. Gord Lowe, for instance, says he doesn't favour a bylaw that would ban Calgarians from using toxic chemicals on lawns and gardens to rid them of weeds such as dandelions.

"I'll support an educational program on pesticide use . . . but I have to point out that the ability to restrict pesticide use or prohibit sales lies with the province of Alberta."

Ald. Brian Pincott argues that council's division on the issue doesn't reflect the feelings of Calgarians, pointing out that surveys show more than 80 per cent public support for a ban.

"Quite frankly, the industry has been very good at getting their message out, that there are no problems," said Pincott.

"But if we sit down and listen to Calgarians' concerns, the concerns of organizations whose prime responsibility is the health and safety of Calgarians and Canadians, then this is something we need to do."

There is a countrywide trend toward outlawing the use of chemicals for aesthetic purposes. In April, Ontario introduced legislation banning the use and sale of pesticides for cosmetic purposes, while Quebec already has a similar law. About 135 communities across Canada have pesticide-free bylaws.

As Calgary considers a municipal bylaw, the province is reviewing its rules on the sale and use of pesticides.

With municipal restrictions in place, local retailers would be unlikely to sell the products in question, but only the province can ban them from store shelves. City restrictions couldn't stop a Calgarian from buying a pesticide, but could impose a fine if they applied the chemical and someone complained.

"Most children think that dandelions are beautiful. I think we need to start looking through the eyes of a child in that way," said Farrell.

She said society is moving toward reducing its reliance on chemicals in favour of protecting our health and the environment. "Will Calgary adopt it now or will we drag our feet for

another decade?" she asked.

At least one aldermen says he will support the proposal -- if it's watered down. Ald. Jim Stevenson would support an bylaw that allows for people to apply for licences to apply pesticides.

The issue has proven to be one of the most divisive and controversial council has ever dealt with, said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart. "I don't believe that I've experienced the special interest lobby to (this) extent . . . since I've been on council -- even on smoking," said the longtime alderman. "This surpassed everything."

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WHERE THEY STAND ON PROPOSED PESTICIDE BAN

Yes

- Ald. Druh Farrell

"Calgarians want this. Surveys we've been doing (show people) want us to reduce our reliance on pesticides."

- Ald. Brian Pincott

"This is about getting rid of the overwhelming (amount) of toxic chemicals that are being used strictly for aesthetic purposes."

- Ald. Joe Ceci

"I think it's important . . . to reduce the use of pesticides where possible in our society because of the accumulation of chemicals in Calgary from cosmetic use on lawns, in particular."

- Ald. Bob Hawkesworth

"I think I was persuaded by the evidence The next step will be to work with stakeholders to create a bylaw that will make sense in the Calgary context."

- Ald. John Mar

"It boils down to one simple argument: do you believe there's a link between cancer and chemicals? If you do believe that, or a possibility that is the case, then it possibly makes sense to err on the side of caution.

No

- Ald. Jim Stevenson

"A total ban would be wrong. I am looking for reduction."

- Ald. Gord Lowe

"I'll support an educational program on pesticide use."

- Ald. Ray Jones

"Once the dandelions take over, the thistles will come in and behind that the ragweed and then Dutch Elm disease. No one has given me an explanation as to how we'll combat what will become a problem."

- Ald. Andre Chabot

"I'm probably not going to support the report. We have all kinds of data, scientific facts that it's not dangerous and the City of Calgary has reduced its usage."

- Ald. Ric McIver

"An outright ban is almost impossible to enforce. It has to be done on a provincewide basis."

- Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart

"If we're going to be putting time and resources into something, let's fight (crime). Let's get more police officers than pesticide officers crawling around at night."

- Ald. Linda Fox-Mellway

"This is a health issue and it belongs to the province. We've got an internal pest management program and it's worked well."

On the fence:

- Ald. Dale Hodges

"If they really want to control pesticide use, they should get the province to institute a ban. But the city can play a role . . . in their use of pesticide."

Unavailable for comment:

- Ald. Joe Connelly

- Mayor Dave Bronconnier

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