

# Pesticide season starts in the town of Cochrane

By Rachel Maclean The Eagle June 17, 2009

Starting on May 25 and ending May 29, the town started spraying a herbicide called Par III in an attempt to kill the small, yellow dandelions that dot the grass and hillsides in and around Cochrane.

The herbicide is a mixture of synthetic toxins with three active ingredients — 2,4-D, Mecoprop and Dicamba.

According to the Sierra Club of Canada 2,4-D has been shown to cause cellular mutations, which can lead to cancer.

But here in Cochrane, fighting the forever pesky dandelion is not an option.

"We have the Alberta weed control act that classifies weeds into three different categories — restricted, noxious and nuisance," said Brad Luft, Cochrane's parks and facilities operator.

"We don't treat anything that is less than noxious, and that is the reason we treat dandelions is because they have been classified as noxious in town, so by law we are required to control them."

The town of Cochrane also sprays for thistles starting in July, and are mandated by the province to treat weeds listed restricted by the province. Those weeds are spot treated and eradicated immediately. If needed, sports fields are treated in the fall.

Luft said he has been with the town for five years and they have always treated dandelions as noxious, which is not the case everywhere around the province.

One other place spraying dandelions is Calgary.

Currently in Calgary, Ald. Brian Pincott has spearheaded a bylaw to ban pesticide use on private land by the end of 2010, and would get the city to stop using pesticides all together if the bylaw is approved after the draft comes out in October.

"We are using poisons to try to make our lawns and fields look prettier," said Pincott. "And it just doesn't make sense."

Pincott said 150 municipalities have banned pesticides, and it is catching on.

In Ontario and Quebec cosmetic pesticides have been banned.

"The time has come," he said. "Our knowledge base on the danger of these chemicals has improved, as well as safe alternatives."

Luft said Cochrane is not looking at a bylaw like it at this time, and their policy is to treat weeds "once a year per site, per pest" to limit the amount of pesticides as dictated by the province's weed control act. The town never "blanket sprays" anything and uses integrative pest management to limit the use of pesticides.

As for dandelions, Luft said they can control them, but will never be able to get rid of them.

The town also has very strict regulations surrounding the signs posted when an area is sprayed, with big yellow signs to notify starting four days before and little signs telling what is being treated.

He said when used properly, and the town hires only professionals as town employees are restricted from using pesticides, after 48 hours the area should be good to open to the public again.

"I hope people obey the signs," he said.

Terry Robertson, parks and facilities manager, said this year \$33,000 will be spent controlling weeds.

Questions on pesticide use can be directed to the parks department at 403-851-2590.

But Coun Ross Watson said Cochrane might want to look at changing their attitudes towards dandelions.

"I think Cochrane should adopt the dandelion as a town flower," said Coun. Ross Watson,

adding it would solve at least some concerns many people have with spraying herbicides. Concerns that Tim Giese, president of the Cochrane Environmental Action Committee, has been well aware of in the past.

"There is a mountain of data out there," said Giese. "Even in small levels, the use of pesticides to control weeds and pests is dangerous."

Giese said pesticides should be the last resort, a position backed by the Canadian Cancer Society.

He said the danger pesticides present to everyone — especially kids, pets — and the problems of leaking into the sewer system or water can make a serious impact on wildlife, insects and fish habitats.

"Even trace levels can impact humans," he said.

Cochrane does have strict policies stating no pesticide application can be made within 30 metres of a body of water.

But, Giese said that people who use pesticides in their homes often don't follow the instructions, precautions, know ingredients, or when to spray. He said it is easy to let the dog out and then there will be residual chemicals in your house.

Also, he said pesticides can be non-discriminatory and kill other plants and good bacteria.

"Generally speaking when there is a vacuum like that then more invasive species can move in," said Giese.

He said if the town knows going after dandelions is a losing battle, then what's the point. Giese thinks alternative landscapes, such as naturoscaping, are the key to not using pesticides. Another suggestion is using corn meal gluten, which won't kill dandelions, but prevents new seeds from germinating.

Laurie Drukier, communication co-ordinator for the town, said the parks department is always looking at innovations in the industry to incorporate for healthy pest free Cochrane. A main strategy is to try and keep the grass in town as healthy as possible so weeds just don't grow.