

Calgary Pesticide Bylaw Turfed – Dec 2, 2009

It's better to do nothing than to pass a do-little pesticide bylaw, aldermen decided today.

After more than two years of debate on banning or limiting non-essential or "cosmetic" pesticide use, city officials proposed a bylaw that still allowed ordinary Calgarians to spot-spray lawns with chemicals and placed even fewer limits on the lawn-care industry.

Aldermen who wanted a total ban thought it was a useless bylaw, and joining them in killing the draft were aldermen who thought Calgary shouldn't regulate pesticide use in the first place.

Ald. Gord Lowe predicted the Alberta government or Ottawa may one day impose such a ban, following the moves of Ontario and Quebec.

"If there's changes around it, that's where it will come from," he said after council's utilities and environment committee voted to reject the bylaw.

Lawn-chemical businesses and golf courses were cautiously in favour of the proposed bylaw, which was much weaker than most municipal bans in Canada. Health advocates, meanwhile, derided it as an "un-bylaw."

"It does nothing in the way it was proposed to protect Calgarians' health, wellness or the environment," said Robin McLeod of Coalition for a Health Calgary.

The Canadian Cancer Society had advocated for tougher action, although council also heard recently that Health Canada tests for cancer risks in the chemicals and says the products are OK when used properly.

Ald. Brian Pincott, who stressed a pesticide ban in his last election campaign, predicted the issue would return when a new council is elected next fall.

The proposed bylaw, more than two years in the making, would have allowed individuals to spot-spray at weeds or insect infestations, but banned them from using hose-based sprays or concentrations for "broadcast" treatment.

Lawn-care businesses and city parks would have faced some new rules in the bylaw, which demanded they post warnings and ensure all applicators were licensed.

Even its architect, city bylaw chief Bill Bruce, said he was happy it was rejected because the rules would have been terribly difficult to enforce.

Aldermen will give the bylaw one last consideration at a future council meeting, but it's likely nothing will change.

By Jason Markusoff, Calgary Herald December 2, 2009.

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