

Herbicide Frequently Asked Questions



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Health, Safety & Water Quality

Q: Should the Town should ban all herbicide use because of the potential for impact on human health and environment?

A: Noxious and prohibited noxious weeds and various insect pests are invasive species that cause significant threat to our agricultural crops, urban forest, the environment and its associated ecosystems. Many of these invasive species are required to be controlled or destroyed by law. Integrated pest management promotes utilizing the best strategy and practices to address a specific pest problem, which includes using herbicides when necessary. Banning them would reduce the number of management tools available allowing some of these invasive species to spread beyond control by other methods. Minimal concentrations of chemicals can be effective when used properly and at the right time during the growing season. Herbicides are applied by Alberta certified pesticide applicators.

Q: Do the products presently used by the Town represent long-term and potentially dangerous hazards to individuals using public lands?

A: Herbicides are a very useful tool for weed control and are especially helpful on sites where weed infestations are severe. There is extensive scientific evidence that herbicides are very safe when applied as intended following instructions for use. As severe weed infestations can be extremely detrimental to the environment and agriculture industry, finding the right balance between chemical use and acceptable weed levels is instrumental. The Town's "Right to Know" bylaw warns users of the area intended for treatment. Herbicides will only be applied when noxious and/or prohibited noxious weeds are present, or when nuisance weeds exceed the threshold levels.

The Pest Management Regulatory Agency of Health Canada is the governing body that approves and grants registration for herbicides in Canada. Prior to receiving Federal registration, the manufacturers are required to demonstrate that products do not pose a significant health risk, as long as they are used in the manner for which they were registered. The Town only uses pest control products that have received Federal registration.

Of far greater concern is the frequency and improper application of herbicides by residents who are not trained in proper application procedures and are not aware of potential harmful human health and environmental impacts. Of particular concern is the application of herbicides prior to storm events which may not provide enough time for the product to break down and become chemically inert. As a result, herbicide products enter the Sheep River and can have adverse effects on aquatic health.

Q: Are children that use tot lots, playgrounds and sports fields and cannot comprehend herbicide warning signs targets for secondary pesticide exposure?

A: Town maintained tot lots and playgrounds are not treated with herbicides. The maintenance practice will be to hand-pull or dig all weeds from turf and gravel areas. The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan recommends a 15 meter "pesticide-free" buffer zone be maintained around playgrounds and tot lots. Sports fields will be closed for maintenance should a herbicide application be necessary. Signage will be posted as per the "Right-to-Know" bylaw.



Aesthetics versus Need

Q: Does the Town indiscriminately use herbicides?

A: The Town does not indiscriminately use herbicides. Indiscriminate use of herbicides contradicts the provincial Environmental Codes of Good Practice for herbicide applications and is subject to prosecution by the provincial government. The frequency of herbicide application on Town land depends on turf health, vigor and quality, location, and maintenance standards and type of park or public land. The maintenance standard for different public lands determines the efforts needed to maintain that site.

Q: Are nuisance weeds such as dandelions invasive and do they pose a threat to municipal public lands?

A: Nuisance weeds are generally opportunistic and symptomatic of growing conditions not adequate to support desirable species. Unhealthy turf and exposed soil areas are susceptible to weeds. Many of the turf grass mixes used are better suited to irrigated sites. Periods of drought can send turf species into dormancy, allowing weeds to flourish with little competition. Weed infested lands are not only unsightly, but can lead to uneven ground (i.e. trip hazards), erosion, and decreased land value. Maintenance practices such as top dressing, aerating, fertilizing, and necessary irrigation are required to keep traditional turf resilient from weed infestation. Chemical applications of herbicide may occur when weeds exceed threshold levels. Where appropriate, especially on non-irrigated sites, native and non-traditional turf mixes should be considered to provide healthy ground cover resistant to weeds.

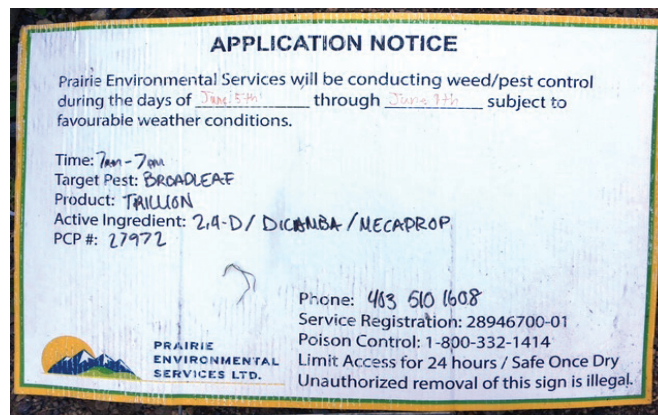
Q: The lists of pests are not all inclusive in the provincial regulations and civic bylaws all-inclusive. How does the Town address that?

A: The IPM Plan will continue ongoing efforts towards determining pest categories and tolerance levels of various pests within the Town. Initial pest management objectives within the plan will be based on the legal pest definitions in the Agricultural Pest Act and Weed Control Act. Further review of these pest species will be determined in future IPM program reviews and in consultation with professional expertise of the Provincial Weed Inspector.



Education & Notification

- Q:** Why are there few formal educational opportunities which would enable communities to understand the methods and principles needed to participate in pest management of civic or private landscapes?
- A:** Different levels of cooperation and participation from residents will result from apparent contradictory messages received from various sources internal and external to the community. The IPM Plan will continue to assist in establishing consistent messages and delivery of information and educational programs on the Plan and how homeowners can utilize IPM principles and practices on their properties.
- Q:** The concern is that the present notification system does not adequately address all potentially susceptible open spaces and parks users. How does the Town address that?
- A:** The IPM Plan provides public notice on herbicide applications. Community areas and residents receive a 24 hour pre-notification of herbicide applications and 48 hour post-notification through warning signs posted at the main entrances to residential areas and directly at the site where applications will occur. Timing of chemical applications is not to conflict with sports field bookings and special events.



- Q:** How are staff trained in IPM?
- A:** Most staff involved in implementing the program bring with them post-secondary training including IPM and cultural management practices. Additional education is provided as needed to Town staff, committees, and Council to help in decision-making about IPM strategies and implementation plans. The IPM Plan recommends establishing regional cooperation and continued participation in external educational training programs for Town employees, developers, and private contractors involved with various aspects of pest management.

Administrative & Political Implications

- Q:** Is it possible for Town parks and open space areas to be “pesticide-free?”
- A:** The IPM Plan establishes a framework to encourage and facilitate community involvement in park maintenance. Although some noxious and prohibited noxious weeds may require chemical application for control, other weeds can be managed through alternate IPM practices, but may not be able to remain within threshold levels. Requests for specific areas to be “herbicide-free” will be considered on a case-by-case basis and may require additional resident consultation.
- Q:** How can information regarding pest management become more consistent/coordinated regionally to ensure that all towns in the area are leaders in environmentally sound pest management which will assist in the preservation and protection of urban and rural landscapes as well as the overall aquatic health of the Sheep River watershed?
- A:** The IPM Plan would establish a framework to develop and encourage other towns in our watershed to implement this or a similar IPM program. The IPM Plan also encourages public education campaigns and educational materials to inform residents of current and alternative pest management practices.

Transportation, Construction and Disturbed Sites

Q: The railway and school bus routes provide mechanisms for weeds to be introduced and transported out of the community, creating a potential impact on rural lands. The school bus parking areas have frequent weed infestations and the railway line also transports weed seeds. How does the down address these issues?

A: The railway has a linear impact on the Town of Okotoks providing a mechanism for weeds to be transported into and out of the community. This means that rural landscapes can be adversely impacted by weeds originating within the Town and vice versa. Similarly, school buses have also had the potential to transport weed seeds. It is recommended that these areas are regularly inspected and actions are taken to remove weed infestations to avoid impact on rural landscapes.

Q: Has increased development affected weed growth in Okotoks?

A: Increased development within the Town has increased disturbed soil areas susceptible to weed infestation as well as introduced soils and potential weed seeds. These areas become unsightly and contribute to the noxious and nuisance weed problem on both urban and rural landscapes. The large quantities of new trees and other plant materials used in new communities also pose a risk to introduce pests. Regular inspections of new plantings on municipal lands are essential to maintaining pest free urban environments and supporting IPM strategies.

From a weed perspective, greater management and control of disturbed soil areas and fill is needed by developers. Okotoks' General Design & Construction Specifications are updated annually to accommodate this goal. Site inspections and orders to control weed growth should be conducted and issued on a regular basis. In minimizing risks of pests, routine inspections occur on trees and shrubs to be planted in new subdivisions and development permits. Also the Town supports and encourages nursery suppliers to join forces with the Domestic Phytosanitary Certification Program (DPCP). This is a program developed by the Canadian nursery industry and supported by the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) promoting clean nursery stock.



For More Information:
Parks: 403-938-8958
okotoks.ca/herbicide

