

# School district seeks method to kill weeds without chemicals

By David Brown  
Of the Emerald

Male angora goats might be chomping on unwanted woody vegetation located on public school grounds next year.

But its more likely, say authorities of Eugene School District 4J, that low-growing ground-covers, shrubs and flowers which deter weed growth could be planted along 4J district fence lines and building perimeters. A tougher turf which fights weed infestation could be planted on playing fields. And weeds could be seared with a "flamer."

Possibly, a reassessment might find community residents' tolerance of weeds to be higher than expected.

"Integrated Weed Management for School Grounds," a report to the school district, suggests those and more alternatives to chemical weed control on public school grounds.

A summary of the report was scheduled for presentation at the 4J board meeting Wednesday evening, but the board postponed consideration until a committee has a chance to study its feasibility.

There is no herbicide policy in 4J's policy book, says Gay Campbell, 4J public information director. However, the district applies herbicides according to a six-point plan of caution enacted in February.

Despite the plan a number of community residents have protested 4J's use of chemical weed killers.

During an alleged incident in April, Amazon Community Tenants of the University's off-campus housing threatened to go to court for an injunction against 4J's herbicide use.

The tenant association retained a private analysis that documented residue of Round-up, a weed killing powder, on vegetables in their gardens at .36 parts per million following application of the controversial chemical to an adjacent fence by 4J workers. A second analysis however, by the Department of Agriculture, showed only .20 parts per million on the community's garden vegetables.

Environmental Protection Agency safety standards permit no more than .20 parts per million on leafy vegetables.

ACT has taken no further legal action because there was no further spraying of that area, says Jane Burkhart, ACT legal representative.

In addition, "grounds maintenance personnel (have) expressed their frustration in trying to select pesticides that are both effective against the target pest and not likely to damage non-target organisms, including humans," the summary reads.

General public concern, not a specific case of litigation against the district's weed control program, prompted the report, Campbell says.



*Emerald Photo*

District 4J seeks alternate ways to deal with weed problems as the public protests the use of chemicals.

The district wants to find the fine line between what's best for both children and maintenance, she says.

The herbicide committee will consist of 12 to 14 board and staff members appointed by Superintendent Terry Lindquist and will submit recommendations to the board this February, in time for next year's weed control program.

4J retained a division of the John Muir Institute of Napa, Calif., to compile the report because of the sixth point in the board's herbicide plan which requires the to call in a consultant to help in development of long range weed control guidelines, Campbell says.

The plan also specifies individual schools implement manual weed control when parents sign an agreement freeing 4J of liability for weed-seed drift into neighboring properties. Play areas cannot be treated with chemicals under the plan, Campbell says.

Notice must be posted 48 hours in advance and weed killers must be applied in accordance with product directions concerning wind and frequency of use, she says.

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