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Are campus pesticides safe? Some say yes, others say no

By John Burket
Of the Emerald

Whether we realize it or not, pesticides are a part of our daily lives. They are used to produce non-organically grown foods, to kill unwanted insects, and to make our lawns and flowerbeds neat and clean.

While many people accept these chemicals as a necessary part of modern life, others are not convinced that using pesticides is worth the health and environmental risk they impose.

Pesticides are used by the University's Physical Plant as part of the grounds-keeping operation. The pesticides used on campus are the herbicides Roundup, Casseron and Amatrol. Insecticides used include Orthene, Malathion and Diazinon, according to Tim King, campus and grounds supervisor.

"We like to use pesticides only when necessary and on a very limited basis," King said.

The amount of the pesticides used is low, King said. Before dilution, about two gallons of Roundup, 200 to 300 pounds of Casseron, and one to two quarts of Orthene are used per year, he said.

"I'm not sure we will use Diazinon any more at all because I have some questions about its safety," King said.

All pesticides are applied by licensed applicators in accordance with recommended guidelines, King said. "We have never had an accident associated with pesticide use," he said.

One of the most commonly used herbicides on campus is glyphosate, which is marketed by the Monsanto company under the trade name Roundup.

"Roundup is used for spot applications to control weeds in areas such as sidewalk cracks, gravel and under trees," King said.

He does not believe Roundup causes any environmental or health problems.

"Roundup is the most widely used herbicide

in landscaping today. It is very safe," he said.

But not everyone agrees that Roundup is safe. The Roundup Information Packet, first released in 1985, is published by the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides. The packet states, "Clearly the situation with Roundup (glyphosate) is far from satisfactory. There is currently a lack of information available to the public regarding the health and environmental effects of glyphosate. What is available is sufficient to raise the concern that such effects may be unreasonably adverse."

The NCAP packet says the tests used to show that Roundup is environmentally safe were invalid.

Over the years, there have been some protests to the use of Roundup on campus, King said, primarily from the University's Survival Center. But King still believes Roundup is necessary.

"We try to control the weeds by mechanical means as much as possible, but due to limitations in the number of personnel, we have to use herbicides. The appearance of the campus would be adversely affected if we stopped using Roundup," he said.

Currently the Physical Plant does not notify people in the areas where pesticides are used when they are applied, King said. "It would take more time to post signs and remove them than it would to spray. Besides, why should we post signs for something that is less hazardous than most cleaning fluids?"

King also said notification by school or local news is impossible because of the unsure spraying schedule. "Spraying depends on the weather, and we can't be sure if we will spray on any given day."

Tom Hicks of the University's Office of Environmental Health and Safety believes the public has a right to know when the sprays are used.

"We have the means here to give notification," he said, including providing information in the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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Voters to cast ballots on SDI moratorium

Even with 22 ballot measures and a number of state and local candidates on the ballot, one issue will not be found when voters enter the polls Tuesday — Star Wars, or the Strategic Defense Initiative.

But a Eugene woman wants to give voters a chance to cast their ballots for or against a moratorium on SDI, designed to

serve as a space-based shield against ballistic missiles.

Sites where people can vote on the issue will be set up outside voting locations in almost every precinct, said Kathy Neeley, who is organizing the poll.

After voting for state and local measures and candidates, people can go to the site, which by law must be at least 100 feet from polling locations, and cast a vote for or against Star Wars by either slipping a green card into a box to vote for a moratorium or using a red card to vote against a moratorium. The vote will be confidential, Neeley said.

People voting on the issue also must sign a statement saying they have voted to keep anyone from being able to throw off the results by voting more than once, she said.

"In effect, the city of Eugene

would be voting on Star Wars," Neeley said. "National statistics show 80 percent (in the United States) say they do not support a moratorium, but I don't think that's true in Eugene."

Neeley said she is hoping for national media attention after she releases the results of the poll, which will be tallied at the Unitarian Church after the polls close at 8 p.m. Tuesday.

Neeley, who came up with the idea about two weeks ago, said the results of the poll will be sent to President Reagan.

Eight precincts are completely covered for the 12 hours during which the polls will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., but Neeley said she needs about 130 volunteers to completely staff the other 60 precincts. The shifts are each four hours long.

People interested in volunteering may call Neeley at 689-3389.

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