

Oregon Dept. of Ag. uses bugs to battle bad weeds

Using good bugs to fight bad weeds is nothing new to Oregon.

No other state can match Oregon in successfully utilizing biological control on noxious weeds. No less than 70 different species of bio-control agents have been released to battle 26 specific weeds. It's a track record that continues to grow.

"We use bio-control on a lot of weeds that are pretty much out of control," said Eric Coombs, entomologist with the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture's (ODA) Weed Control Program. "Bio-control is another tool in our arsenal against noxious weeds."

The successes in Oregon are many, the failures few. That's mostly because a lot of research must be completed before the tiny insects are allowed to take on the target.

Officials need to know there is a reasonable chance that the bio-control agent will not only survive in Oregon, but be effective in damaging the target weed.

"What we have tried to do is bring in selected natural enemies of these undesirable, non-native plants," said Coombs. "We screen them for several years. There is a special process that ensures these bio-control agents are safe so that when we release them, they attack the weed, and that

once the weed starts to disappear, these agents won't attack crops or native plants."

ODA doesn't just bring in a bug on Monday and have the weed disappear by Friday. History shows it can take decades before the final report card can be issued.

"We had a lot of success in dealing with tansy ragwort back in the 1970s and '80s, but it took 15 to 20 years for the full impact to take place," said Coombs.

Tansy ragwort remains the poster child for ODA's successful bio-control of noxious weeds. The plant still exists in Oregon, but at populations small enough to avoid the damage done to livestock in the past. The cinnabar moth was the first agent used on ragwort.

The flea beetle and seed fly have taken over much of the control in recent years. West of the Cascades, it is estimated that reduction of the poisonous weed has saved more than \$5 million each year in cattle and losses since '86.

"When we look back at our costs of the tansy bio-control program, there is about a 15 to 1 cost-benefit ratio," said Coombs. "For every dollar we spend on the program, we return \$15 in benefits. Not many programs do that."

Oregon limits amount of heavy metal in fertilizer

The Oregon Dept. of Agriculture (ODA) has adopted new administrative rules to implement changes in Oregon's fertilizer law enacted during the 2001 legislative session.

In establishing the rules, Oregon becomes only the fifth state to set limits on the amount of heavy metals allowed in fertilizer products.

The new rules will be effective Jan. 1, '03. Changes in ODA's originally proposed rules reflect input from testimony provided during public hearings and a public comment period.

ODA Director Phil Ward said that the updated Oregon Fertilizer Law and the new rules will protect consumers and will provide necessary information to purchase and use such products.

The new administrative rules establish:

*Maximum limits of arsenic (As), cadmium (Cd), mercury (Hg), nickel (Ni), and lead (Pb) allowed in fertilizer, agricultural amendment, agricultural mineral, and lime products that are offered for sale or distribution in Oregon.

*An Internet address to be added to product labels to provide the public with relevant product information. Manufacturers must have the website printed on product labeling by Jan. 1, '04.

*Minimum detection limits for heavy metals laboratory analyses.

*Guidelines for civil penalty enforcement based on the magnitude of the violation.

After reviewing research and regulatory processes in other states, ODA chose to base Oregon metal standards on available risk assessments that focus primarily on human health risks. The new metal standards are more expansive than other states as they apply to a wider variety of products on the market in Oregon.

ODA will coordinate future research in an effort to generate Oregon-specific information to better understand the interaction of metals, which may be contained in fertilizer products, and the environment. Every three years, ODA will consult with the Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality, the Oregon Dept. of Human Resources, and other parties to evaluate new scientific data to determine if adjustments to the metal standards are warranted.

Utilizing current and future scientific research in the assessment of metals will allow ODA to remain protective and preventative in setting metal levels.

For more information or copies of the final rules, <http://oda.state.or.us/fertilizer/index.html>

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House Bill restores funds depleted after Jan. vote

House Speaker Karen Minnis (R-Wood Village) has appointed a Special Committee on Budget to ensure the quick passage of House Bill 5075, an emergency care package which restores \$15.15 million in funding to the mentally ill, seniors, the medically-needy and state police.

"The legislature has a moral obligation to restore funding to those programs that could literally mean life or death for some Oregonians," Minnis said.

"It is essential that we pass the bill soon to preserve the health and safety of the mentally ill, seniors, and the medically-needy who receive life-saving medications. In addition, the bill maintains the ability of the state police to investigate serious crimes by restoring some funding for forensic labs," she said.

The membership of the Special Committee on Budget includes Rep. Alan Bates (D-Eagle Point) and Rep. Rob Patridge (R-Medford).

Speaker Minnis' Emergency Care Package announced February 4 includes the following: DHS- Mental

Health, 122 residential beds, \$660,000; DHS- Seniors & People with Disabilities, Senior in-home/community-based long-term care (priority levels 10-14), \$4.86 million; DHS- Oregon Medical Assistance Program, Senior in-home/community-based long-term care (priority levels 10-14), \$1.39 million; DHS- Seniors & People with Disabilities, medically needy, \$400,000; DHS- Oregon Medical Assistance Program, medically needy, \$6.98 million; Oregon State Police, Forensics and 40 Patrol positions included in Gov.'s 03-05 Proposed Budget, \$1.2 million, totaling \$15.49 million.

The above-listed programs would be paid for by using \$9 million from the projected Lottery Fund ending balance, \$3 million from the remaining Emergency Fund balance, \$2.5 million from the remainder of the Master Tobacco Settlement Fund and \$950,000 from additional tobacco tax revenue.

TOP MOVIES

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 2. Chicago Richard Gere PG-13
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