

Chemical Spray Along Railroad Tracks Reduced

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Union Pacific Railroad's tracks run through Eugene's Whiteaker and other neighborhoods, and that means when UP sprays pesticides for "vegetation control" in a 12-foot swath on either side of the tracks, people, pets and nearby gardens are affected.

Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics, a group that has long worked to watchdog, eliminate and reduce the use of toxic chemicals, contacted UP with concern about one of the chemicals on the spray list, Picloram, and UP has now agreed not to spray that pesticide. After being contacted by Arkin and Eugene City Councilor Claire Syrett, Brock Nelson of UP responded by email saying, "I've spoken with our vegetation control contractor, and we will not be using Picloram in Eugene this year."

Arkin says Picloram's label has "warning after warning saying do not use this product where the groundwater table is shallow or near exposed surface water like wetlands." She says there is a shallow groundwater table as well as wetlands in the area to be sprayed.

Picloram is known to travel through soil and kill edible and ornamental gardens, and that would have put people in the Whit, Bethel and Trainsong neighborhoods, who use their garden as a source of food, at risk, Arkin says. "Picloram does not discriminate against a broad leaf weed or someone's tomato plant."

Arkin says that Beyond Toxics' work on the issue, based on the group's experience with the chemical's effects in other parts of Oregon, helped the community escape the poison and UP escape liability "because this chemical is a known groundwater pollutant" and the "worst actor" in the group of chemicals to be sprayed, which is why Beyond Toxics asked it not be applied. "As you know, in pesticide use the label is the law," Arkin wrote in her email to UP about the chemical.

According to the spray list sent out by the city, UP was expected to begin its spraying March 25 and the chemicals still on the list include Alecto 41S, EsplAnade 200 SC, Chemsurf 90 and SFM Extra. UP notifies the city of intent to spray, but the city "does not control the method of weed control, what is sprayed or when the spraying occurs," the city's spray notice says.

Nelson has also forwarded Arkin's concerns with EsplAnade being sprayed near surface water to the contractor, he writes in an email.

Eugene itself has an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy in place that uses toxics as a last resort, but Arkin says it is "in transition" and needs updating, citing the city's flower baskets that are sprayed with a bee-killing neonicotinoid chemical.

About the Author »



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Camilla Mortensen is associate editor and reporter at *Eugene Weekly*. She is also a folklorist and a community college and university instructor. She has two horses, an assortment of dogs, and lives in a 1975 Airstream trailer.

Sometimes all these details collide in unforeseen ways.

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