



## Legislature begins negotiating weed killer spray reforms

Reynolds-Spray - 03

A helicopter used to spray herbicides in Douglas County in 2014. Oregon's aerial spray laws are the West Coast's weakest. *(Courtesy of Dena Reynolds)*

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Legislators, industry and environment representatives are beginning to reconcile reform proposals for Oregon laws governing the spray of weed killers from helicopters.

A 2014 investigation by The Oregonian/OregonLive found Oregon **does less than neighboring states to protect people and the environment** from chemicals sprayed to control weeds after clearcuts.

Oregon's rules even do more for fish than people. Streams with fish get a 60-foot buffer. Homes and schools get none, despite the risk of toxic chemicals drifting.

A legislative workgroup is scheduled to start meeting Tuesday.

State Sen. **Chris Edwards**, D-Eugene, who convened the group, told The Oregonian/OregonLive he expects the issue to be one of the most contentious facing the 2015 Legislature.

But Edwards, chairman of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee, said enough conflicts have occurred in Oregon forests to warrant reform. "Even industry understands that," he said.

"What we have currently is not working for people that live in the forestland and forestland interface," Edwards said. "What remains to be seen is what is most protective for those folks and politically feasible in the capitol."

Edwards said he wanted the workgroup to "find common ground where there seems to be none currently."

A proposal from state Sen. **Michael Dembrow**, D-Portland, would make Oregon's spraying laws hew closer to those in Washington and California, increasing transparency and requiring companies to notify neighbors about their plans to spray and burn slash.

Today, coastal residents must listen for the sound of approaching helicopters as their only warning that toxic chemicals are being sprayed.

Dembrow's bill, co-sponsored by state Rep. **Ann Lininger**, D-Lake Oswego, would require the state forestry board to mandate protective buffers around homes and schools. The forestry board in 1996 removed a no-spray buffer around homes.

A package of bills in the House from state Rep. **Brian Clem**, a Salem Democrat with strong timber ties, would require more training for pilots and those who investigate complaints while increasing funding to respond to incidents. Clem questioned the types of notifications and buffers Dembrow and Lininger proposed.

Still, Clem, who has received more than \$23,000 in campaign donations from the timber industry since 2008, said he hopes to find middle ground.

"Their ideas are in the ballpark of possible," he said. "I want to get the different concepts on the table and see if they're workable."

Reform advocates called Clem's plan a distraction that does little to prevent problems, only react after they occur.

"What I see in this is that the timber industry rejects transparency and accountability," said Lisa Arkin, executive director of Beyond Toxics, a Eugene advocacy group. "People deserve to be able to take steps to protect themselves and be treated like people in other states that do provide advanced notification."

Dembrow said elements of Clem's bills would boost the part of his plan that aims to improve incident response.

"There are some who see those bills as replacements, but I don't see it that way," Dembrow said. "We need legislation that leads to reasonable buffers around schools, residences, and drinking water, and gives neighbors real-time, advance notice when a spray is going to happen next to their homes."

A spokeswoman for Gov. Kate Brown said her office was "engaged in the conversation" and will have a representative in the workgroup.

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