

Briefing 07/55 October 2007

EU Thematic Strategy for Pesticides

Key issues

- Framework Directive setting out common objectives and requirements to ensure coherence throughout the EU
- The establishment of National Action Plans to reduce hazards, risks and dependence on chemical control for plant protection
- The impact on use of amenity pesticides within Local Authorities
- Timescales

1. Introduction

The European Commission has proposed a strategy to address the threats posed by the use of pesticides to human health and the environment, improve the way pesticides are used and reduce their use in a way which is consistent with the necessary level of protection against pests. This will mean the withdrawal of pesticides in public amenity areas and the EU Environment Committee recently voted in favour of the proposals to the Council and European Parliament.

The strategy focuses on plant protection products (PPPs), the largest group of pesticides and the proposal or Framework Directive sets out common objectives and requirements in order to ensure coherence throughout the EU between the Member States which have already adopted measures addressing the threats of these pesticides and those who have not.

The new Framework Directive proposes that:

- Member States establish National Action Plans to reduce hazards, risks and dependence on chemical control for plant protection.
- Stakeholders be involved in setting up, implementing, and adapting the national plans
- A system of awareness-raising and training of all professional pesticides users is created.
- Compulsory inspection of existing application equipment be introduced
- Aerial spraying is only authorised in situations where there are no viable alternatives or where it has clear advantages in terms of reduced impacts on health.
- Protection of the aquatic environment be enhanced
- Areas of significantly reduced or zero pesticide use be designated by Member States

- Safe conditions are established for storage and handling of pesticides and their packaging and remnants.

2. Issues

In real terms for local authorities this can mean the withdrawal of amenity pesticides to control weeds, fungal diseases and insect pests in many public areas and this could have a dramatic impact on public safety and health, leisure and tourism facilities and the safety of workers.

Current uses of amenity pesticides within local authorities include:

- **Footpaths** – Weed control for pedestrian safety and minimal maintenance costs
- **Highways** – Weed control for grass verges and invasive weeds can cause extensive damage to highways
- **Sports, Leisure and cultural facilities** – Damage by pests, diseases and weeds to sports fields or playgrounds or valuable historic sites can reduce user time and will have a considerable impact on leisure and tourism.
- **Housing** – Pathways and footpaths clear of weeds. Weeds harbour vermin, encourage litter, fly tipping and graffiti.

The proposals could impact on the entire amenity sector as, in summary, they aim to restrict or ban the use of pesticides in parks, gardens, sports grounds verges and playgrounds, and they could push up weed control costs by up to 50 per cent.

3. Conclusion

The consultation period for the strategy ended in December 2006. Only a handful of local councils and grounds maintenance companies responded but this may be because the effects of the proposals on public sector and private sector grounds maintenance services are not obvious in the strategy or the consultation papers.

Although APSE does support restrictions on the use of pesticides to protect health and the environment there is some concern that the proposals will increase the costs for Local Authorities and may result in a reduced level of service for the public. The low level of response by local councils within the consultation period indicates that many of those who will be affected by the strategy are unaware of its content.

All members are encouraged to examine the proposals and establish how the strategy will affect their services and service delivery.

The vote is due to take place during week commencing 22nd October 2007. Voluntary organisations representing the amenity sector have sent a brief to all UK MEP's before the vote in order that they fully understand the impact if this should go ahead, and they are urging all organisations to contact their own MEP and make their views known to reinforce a clear message.

As the timescales are so limited APSE recommends that if members wish to comment on the proposals they contact their MEP direct or contact www.amenity.org.uk. Any comments should also be forwarded to Anne Clayton at APSE on aclayton@apse.org.uk.

Anne Clayton
Principal Advisor