

## AMENITY FORUM OPEN EVENT

Main Sponsor: JSD Research and Development



## Notes from “Critical times for Amenity Pesticide Use – meeting the challenge”

October 4<sup>th</sup> 2011, Lantra House, Stoneleigh Park, CV8 2LG

### Summary

In a time of uncertainty and many pressures the Amenity Forum provides a focus for the views of the sector. The event was arranged to inform the Forum’s future agenda.

The Sustainable Use Directive, about which an announcement is due soon, does not state that users need to be trained as the current law does. Will government insist on compulsory training and risk that this is perceived as gold plating despite widespread industry support for training to be compulsory? There are also issues about reconciling the SUD with the Water Framework Directive and with enforcement in some situations.

Continued use of herbicides is vital for satisfactory amenity standards. Research in Kent assessing impacts of using less and no herbicides on hard surfaces is showing how expensive and sometimes unsafe alternatives are. STRI work shows how key herbicides are on sports surfaces.

Training is vital for using herbicides safely and qualified staff are compliant, use materials more efficiently and so save money. And they have less impact on the environment. Some local authorities appear to be moving away from requiring trained staff.

The Forum seeks to be a key driver for better standards in amenity and the key provider of “best practice” principles. Discussion at the event brought forward a range of issues and ideas about how to tackle them which the Forum needs to prioritise. Important among these was raising the Forum’s profile among amenity clients to improve the quality of amenity work everywhere. Particular targets should be the estimated 50% of local authorities who do not specify Amenity Assured contractors. Demonstrating that high quality work on amenity pays should be a key message to get across.

The Forum needs a strong and vibrant membership to increase its power to represent the sector in these challenging times.

### Introduction

#### **Maintaining standards & quality in challenging economic times**

Professor John Moverley, Chairman, Amenity Forum

We are in a time of lots of pressures – the Amenity Forum provides a focus for the views of the sector and the event has been arranged to inform our future agenda. The public are saying they want weed control and the use of pesticides is essential – but we need to have good practice in all aspects. For example the Forum’s consultation on contracts reveals, worryingly, that local authorities are reducing their standards of amenity care to save money and, in so doing, damaging these important areas visually, making them hazardous for users and storing extra costs for remediation in future.

We need a strong membership to increase our power to represent the sector in these challenging times.

### **The Role of the Amenity Forum**

- Promote and encourage proper and responsible use of pesticides as well as integrated methods for the control of pests, weeds and diseases.
- Lead, coordinate and encourage "Best Practice" objectives in amenity pesticide use.
- Coordinate and encourage establishment of sustainable qualifications, training and CPD activity
- Organise activities for membership
- Act as a lobby body to those who influence policy and increase awareness of all about the importance of the amenity sector and pest control

### **Some examples of Amenity Forum actions and activities:**

- Prepare and issue Guidance Notes to support 'Best Practice'
- Organise Conferences, Seminars, Consultations and Workshops
- Brief UK and European politicians & other key stakeholders about the amenity sector
- Work closely with the Chemicals Regulation Directorate to ensure the Amenity Action Plan meets the requirements of the National Pesticides Strategy.
- Lead on developments in training, CPD and related matters.

### **Some Issues for the sector very much in focus in the last year of Forum activity**

- Understanding of the sector and its importance
- The impact of legislation
- Weed control on hard surfaces
- Managed Amenity Turf & the Use of Pesticides
- The importance of training & CPD
- Promoting & discussing the issues with Government & related bodies
- Funding cuts – quality & standards

### **Understanding the sector & its importance**

- Clear lack of understanding - why pesticides are needed - their importance to sector
- This lack of knowledge - wide range of people - consumer to policy maker
- Creates real issues - financial decisions – policy - standards
- The Amenity Forum is the focus - represents - provides views of the sector

### **SUD Legislation Update**

- The Forum has lobbied Ministers, CRD & others & responded to consultations -press releases highlighting key issues & concerns
- Been fully involved with implementation plans – the Forum is concerned that it is still unclear & on delayed timescales
- Reducing bureaucracy - we support Government's drive to increase efficiency. But we are concerned that this should not lower standards – concerned with aspects of the 'copy out' approach.
- The Forum still lobbies all Government Departments especially the Department for Communities and Local Government & DEFRA

## **Sustainable Use Directive (SUD & weed control)**

### **SUD: Where are we now?**

Grant Stark, Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD)

The SUD is part of a fundamental review of pesticides regulation – covering approval of products, application standards, monitoring the impact on the environment and the directive on sustainable use. The directive has

two aims – to reduce risks to the environment and to promote integrated pest management. It is an EU directive but it is up to member states to implement it. CRD does this for the UK.

A key feature is a National Action Plan which describes how we will proceed with the regulations and which lists measures on training, sales, protection of water, reduction of use or risks in public spaces, handling and storage and low-input pest management.

Likely Amenity measures – training is a hot topic. All that the SUD says is that ‘there must be access to training’. This would represent a fall in standards in the UK as training is now compulsory. Sellers too will need access to training and certificates which show they are safe and competent.

The SUD also needs to support the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in terms of products, buffer zones, reducing risk in public places, run off from transport systems – may involve minimising or even prohibiting pesticide use. Handling and storage measures must show no danger to human health or the environment. Low input pest management is to be promoted.

### **Progress so far...**

Published in 2009. There will be a 2 year transition for some provisions. Needs to be in force Nov 2011 but doesn't finally take full effect till 2020. There has been a public consultation.

The Government view is affected by the drive towards de-regulation. An important requirement is that business is not disadvantaged.

An announcement is expected soon.

### **Issues...**

The SUD does not state that users need to be trained – do you insist on training and will this be perceived as gold plating? However there is widespread industry support for compulsory training.

Pesticides and water – WFD is a fundamentally different approach – hazard based instead of risk based like pesticides and these two approaches need to be reconciled.

Enforcement is a problem in some situations.

“We are doing everything required by the SUD at the moment.”

## **Controlling weeds on hard surfaces**

Neil Hipps, East Malling Research

The project is looking at coping if pesticides cannot be used or if you had to reduce use. It's linked with the future need to protect groundwater resources by decreasing inputs of pesticides.

The project is led by East Malling Research and includes the University of Hertfordshire on the economic and environmental assessment, Kent Highway Services, Languard VM and the Environment Agency.

Themes – the research needs to be as practical as possible – there is a high dependence on ground water for drinking water – pesticides have already passed into ground water and have to be removed before it can be used for drinking water.

The experiment used 10 zones each getting 3 treatments and looking at 3 areas of footpaths – kerb (0.25m wide), middle (1m) and house (0.25m). The results cover the first year of the project between March and November 2010. Treatments:

1. Standard herbicide treatment
2. Integrated – one herbicide spray then thermal or mechanical control
3. No herbicide at all – 3.5 times with thermal, 3.5 times with mechanical and one hand weeding

Reactive rather than prescriptive treatment

A Dutch system of pictures was used to help define an acceptable level of weed cover. This has been refined after the first year's experience. A website is being prepared to publish the system. But contact Neil Hipps if you are interested in more detail: [Neil.Hipps@emr.ac.uk](mailto:Neil.Hipps@emr.ac.uk)

Most of the weeds found were perennials like meadow grass or rhizomatous weeds. The highest levels of weeds were on the house-side and kerbside of pavements with less between. Pavement edges were problem areas. The non-herbicide treatment was not as effective on kerbside as chemical. The standard herbicide treatment gave the best results – though weed populations were low everywhere. A reactive approach is better than a planned approach.

Weed populations may change over time with different treatments but there was no evidence of this during the first year.

### **What happens to herbicides**

Drain water was sampled. Local schools were used for meteorology. WFD calls for <0.1ppb and levels measured were well above this (but it's not drinking water). Glyphosate does get washed off hard surfaces when it rains – rain just after the integrated treatment led to levels of 60ppb in the drains. The first rainfall event after treatment is the most significant.

### **Practical issues and challenges**

Earlier treatments have given better results

Practicality - eg fire risk from thermal treatments, stone risks and treating around parked vehicles for non herbicide treatments. Brushes do a good job of clearing the edge of pavements but they leave debris in the street so there is a need to co-ordinate with cleansing departments. Labour very much higher for non-herbicide treatments

Have changed integrated treatment – now permitted to use the one herbicide dressing at any time. This has reduced the amount of herbicide used a lot.

### **Integrated weed control for sports & leisure surfaces – some issues**

Dr. Ruth Mann, Head of Turfgrass Protection, STRI

Winter sports turf – mainly smooth stalked meadow-grass and perennial ryegrass. Annual meadow grass is the main weed plus broad-leaved weeds at renovation and clover in low input situations.

Fine turf areas like bowling greens, golf courses and cricket pitches – bent/fescue or creeping bent, perennial ryegrass, smooth stalked meadow-grass. Annual meadow-grass, Yorkshire fog, perennial ryegrass and broadleaved weeds are problems.

### **Weeds and moss...**

- Are unsightly
- Create uneven playing surfaces
- Increase susceptibility to disease – annual meadow grass and broad leaved weeds are more susceptible to disease and affect the rest of the sward
- Compete with desirable grass
- Reduce wear tolerance
- Make hard surfaces and pathways unsafe

### **Playability**

Firmness and moisture content – high moisture and high organic matter lead to less firmness

### **Controls**

Broadleaved weeds – pH, regular fertiliser, improve light and airflow, drainage, relieve compaction, wetting agents, regular mowing, remove clippings, remove high and low spots, discourage earthworms (they bring weed seeds to the surface) by removing casts and acidifying, scarify to take out rosette-type weeds, need to use high value seeds to reduce contamination.

## Chemical control

- Broadleaved weeds - synthetic auxins in varying mixtures e.g. MCPA, dicamba, clopyralid and fluroxypyr
- Mosses - Ferrous sulphate or carfentrazone-ethyl
- Grasses - Pinoxaden (ryegrass/Yorkshire fog in fescue) and Tepraloxydim (AMG in fescue – SOLA)

## Problem areas

- Annual meadow-grass control in desirable grasses
- Germander speedwell
- Baby's tears (*Soleirolia soleirolii*)
- Mosses esp. silver moss (*Bryum argenteum*)

[www.stri.co.uk](http://www.stri.co.uk)

## Training & standards

### The importance of training & a commitment to Continuing Professional Development

Steve Hewitt, Lead Portfolio manager, City & Guilds (G&G), Chairman - Amenity Forum Education & Skills Committee

SUD may 'copy out' compulsory training. The law also says there have to be certificates.

Training is a cost to business and has to be valued by clients to be justified. Some local authorities appear to be moving away from requiring trained staff. But qualified staff are compliant, use materials more efficiently and so save money and they have less impact on the environment.

The Amenity Forum is looking to raise standards and that includes training. The Forum seeks to be a key driver for better standards in amenity and the key provider of "best practice" principles.

Clients also need to be 'trained'.

City & Guilds have a number of advanced CPD systems in place which cope with the dramatic change which has occurred over recent years (less stress on human safety and more on environmental safety). Also there have been new techniques and more mechanisation which require better trained staff.

We need to set on record details of our highly skilled workforce – their skills are not recognised.

Amenity Forum membership gives C&G and BASIS access to the people who can help with training materials which need to be kept up to date.

The Amenity Assured Standard makes sure contractors are up to standard. It is a voluntary system which sets participating contractors above everyone else.

"CPD continues your qualifications"

The Amenity Forum is urging government to make a clear commitment to maintaining standards.

## What are the key issues & priorities for the sector and the Forum - developing an action plan

Group discussions led by Gary Harland, Wakefield Council and Chairman of Amenity Forum Communications Group, and Paul Singleton, BASIS

### Some issues...

- The state of the economy is producing pressure to reduce the price of contracts and to take on bigger workloads. At the same time costs of materials and labour are rising.
- Uncertainty has produced lots of late starts to contracts and it's costly playing catch up.
- Certification – regulation – SUD

- Integrated approaches
- Product Approval
- Minimisation of use
- Residuals - where do they fit in?
- Overall environmental pressures
- Amenity Forum – identity, coverage –as an industry we are poor at telling the public what we do.
- Policing – not done very thoroughly – a big part is down to us – we need to be more active about giving evidence to CRD when we know of problems.
- Major advantages – weeds grow every year! We are a care business
- Councils cutting weed spraying may have bigger bills next year
- Amenity Forum could be better at planning action – watch clients and others –regular meetings – photos of areas – joint inspection – prioritising
- How do we plan integrated approaches? Eg do contractors subcontract sweepers use casual labour for handwork or prison labour?
- Spreading cost – contractors should consider offering services for non amenity jobs.
- Storage and handling
- Good practice – quality must be sustained
- Demonstration days that show what you can do

## Discussion

### How can AF increase its communication? Some ideas:

- Use the press more especially trade Journals
- Stop talking to ourselves
- Let people see the benefits
- A more co-ordinated approach across the sector
- Find a national media spokesperson for our side of the industry
- The key people to influence are clients – identify the right people to contact in councils etc. Managers who run the contracts are key – they often do not understand impacts
- Not enough credit given for those doing the job
- Produce case studies of well maintained towns and cities
- Get examples of good practice - timings of sprayings etc for maximum impact publicised
- And bad practice!
- We are a very broad church – we need to identify specialist spokespeople for each area – link into ILAM and other professional bodies.
- There is a trend towards big companies taking over whole areas of facilities management and they will be the clients of the future. There is also a trend the other way to manage smaller and smaller contracts in smaller geographic areas.
- There are opportunities for contractors to work together
- There is a negligible amount of checking that standards are being met
- We need money based examples which show that good practice saves money. EG a London Borough made 95% saving in costs moving from strimming to herbicides. And the carbon footprint of herbicides is much lower than strimming
- Volunteers cannot do work which needs trained personnel
- The 50% of local authorities who do not specify Amenity Assured contractors are the target audience
- Informing the public is difficult – they are not interested – they just have an expectation that the standards are there

- We need a website with the most up to date professional advice especially for local authority people who are multitasking and do not understand all that they should.

## Concluding Remarks

Danny Hayward, Managing Director, JSD Rail Research & Development

Remembering how things used to be – we have come a long way!

Striking points:

- Grant Stark – the difference between hazard and risk approaches
- Neil Hipps – what are the costs of doing without herbicides he was ‘stunned by the extra costs’
- Ruth Mann – again the key role of herbicides
- Steve Hewitt – passionate argument for training – ‘copying out’ = copping out!
- Gary Harland and Paul Singleton – a long list of possible action which needs prioritising

The Amenity sector is a success story – we need to support each other to get this across.

We must preserve the right to use pesticides

**The Amenity Forum is also very grateful for support for this event from Vale Engineering (York) Ltd, Lantra, Rigby Taylor and Nomix Enviro.**

