3. HERBICIDE USE – PARKS AND RESERVES AREAS

Officer responsible	**Author**
Parks and Waterways Manager	Chris Rance, DDI 941-8391

The purpose of this report is to update the Council with a summary of herbicides currently used in parks and reserves and provide comment on their effectiveness.

BACKGROUND

Concerns have been expressed about the effectiveness of herbicides currently in use in parks and reserves.

The Parks and Waterways Unit current practice on use of hazardous substances is predominantly focused on the safe application and responsible use of chemicals such as herbicides. This responsibility is governed by existing legislation, including the Local Government Act, the Health and Safety in Employment Act, and the Resource Management Act. The contract document for parks maintenance supports this approach and requires strict compliance with relevant specifications such as the Agrichemical Users Code of Practice and that all contractor's staff using herbicides must have a current Growsafe Standard Certificate.

CURRENT CHEMICAL USE

The Chemical Spray Schedule that forms part of the Parks Maintenance Contract is attached for information (Appendix 1).

This Schedule defines the herbicides that may be used within the contract and for what purpose. The bulk of the chemical used by the Council in parks and reserves are applied through our contractor, City Care Ltd, in accordance with this schedule. Roundup/Versatil are the most common total weed control herbicide in use for our maintenance purposes. In addition, City Care undertake weed control of turf weeds throughout the city on specific instruction from staff of the Parks and Gardens Unit.

Additional herbicide spraying is carried out by staff from the Regional Parks Team and Botanic Gardens using their own staff or contract labour.

Typically these other application areas use smaller quantities of similar herbicide on a targeted basis for specific problems. An example of this is the use of Vigilant Gel to treat willow saplings in the Travis Swamp.

Annual chemical usage (all City Care contracts) totals approx 4,300 litres. The most significant of these are:

Roundup	2,700 Litres
Versatil	800 Litres
Reglone	200 Litres

The additional work carried out by the Regional and Botanic Gardens staff totals some 50 litres with Roundup forming 60% of this.

FUTURE USE

Minimal public reaction has occurred from the application of the currently specified herbicides.

Some changes in the type of herbicides used will undoubtedly occur in the future as new products become available. The chemical suppliers actively market all new products and staff regularly receive updates from the agrichemical industry about these. New products that show promise are investigated and given an appropriate trial.

Various alternatives have been tried in the past and have generally resulted in higher unit cost and more inconvenience to the public

For example, in a comparison between Greenscape, an organic product and Roundup; Roundup, shows marked cost benefits.

Greenscape has proven to be:

- Six times more expensive
- Labour costs are 25 % higher as application is slower
- Effective period of control is 30% less needing more frequent visits
- Application conditions are more restricted
- Applicators experience more nausea from stronger odour of Greenscape

From this example it is evident that there can be significant cost impacts from the introduction of a new “user friendly” herbicide or use of mechanical, non chemical methods.

It is important to recognise the potential for increases in maintenance costs from policy changes and note that in some cases, herbicide control is the only option that will deal with a particular invasive plant. Examples of this are the Egeria densa aquatic weed found in the Avon River and the purple loosestrife plant invading the Cockayne Reserve and river margins. Purple loosestrife is currently being targeted under a joint eradication campaign in association with DOC and ECan staff. In both situations the control and potential eradication of the plant would not be possible without the use of a herbicide.

Similarly many restoration projects areas rely on the use of herbicides to allow new plantings to establish and flourish.

It is believed by Parks maintenance staff that the current practice for herbicide use represents our best options at the present time.

Chairman’s Recommendation: That the information be received.