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CITY OF Leduc

2022 Cosmetic Pesticide Research
In-Depth Interview
Draft Report

November 25, 2022

Study Background & Methodology

Study Background

The City of Leduc contracted Y Station to engage with their residents regarding cosmetic pesticide use in the City. As part of the research, Y Station conducted the following:

- 10 in-depth interviews (5 with representatives from environmental groups and 5 with pesticide applicators within the City).
- A general population survey with n=400 interviews with City of Leduc residents 18+, conducted via telephone (n=207) and social media (n=193). The final data set was weighted to ensure proper demographic representation. Results of this survey have been provided under a separate cover.
- An open link survey provided on the City of Leduc website and social media received n=37 responses. Results of these interviews have been provided under a separate cover.
- A version of the survey was emailed out to commercial property owners. After the first week of data collection, reminder telephone calls were made to encourage participation. This version of the survey received n=96 responses. Results of this survey have been provided under a separate cover.

Study Completion Dates

Data collection was carried out from October 16 to November 17, 2022.

Beautification and Naturalization

In general, the pesticide applicators were satisfied with what is being done to maintain the beauty of the City's parks and green spaces, noting there is a good balance of manicured areas and natural landscapes. However, there are some areas for improvement. One participant mentioned there is too much monoculture and the City could benefit from a larger variety of tree species. Another participant mentioned that the City could be doing more to maintain the green spaces, in general. Pesticide applicators were also satisfied with the naturalization efforts of more environmentally sensitive areas in the City. A couple applicators noted there are areas within the City where noxious weeds like thistle are becoming an area of concern and more maintenance should be done to control this.

Compared to the pesticide applicators, the environmental group participants were less satisfied with what is being done to maintain the beauty of the City's parks and green spaces, providing satisfaction ratings of 2 or 3 out of 5. A couple of participants mentioned that not enough is being done to reduce dandelions and thistle in community flower beds, while another participant mentioned that too many medicinal weeds are being killed off, which is detrimental to pollinators. Most environmental group participants rated naturalization efforts as a 3 or 4 out of 5, noting that efforts should still be made in these areas to reduce noxious weeds like thistle.

Common Pests

Pesticide applicators most commonly experienced weeds and insects in their line of work, mainly dandelions, thistle, and common tansy. The most frequently mentioned herbicides used to combat these weeds by pesticide applicators included Par 3, Mecoprop, Dicamba, 2,4-D, Lontrel and Roundup.

Mosquitos, ants and spiders were the most common insects mentioned. Pesticide applicators spray insecticides and use a garlic spray for the mosquitos.

Alternative pest control methods included mowing, edging, spiking and slit seeding. One participant mentioned using drag nets for mosquitos and cage trapping for larger rodents like rabbits.

With regards to trends, some applicators mentioned that homeowners want more input into what is being done to maintain the beauty of their yard, in general. One participant mentioned that there was an increased desired for using mechanical methods to remove weeds, or for pesticide alternatives a few years ago, but the alternatives were not as effective in combating pests.

Common Pests

Environmental group respondents also experienced weeds and insects on their personal property. The most common weeds were dandelion and thistle. Other pests mentioned include mice, voles, aphids, mosquitos, and red beetles.

4 out of the 5 environmental group respondents interviewed indicated that they use herbicide, fungicide and/or insecticide on their property, including Roundup, 2,4-D, insecticide soaps. One participant also used hard or poison traps for mice.

The majority of environmental group respondents noted that they only spot-spray herbicides for weeds and mainly use alternative pest control methods. This included hand pulling weeds, mowing, edging, and mulching. One participant ensured there was no standing water on their property for mosquitos to breed, and another mentioned plugging up holes on their property so mice couldn’t enter.

Pesticide Benefits

When asked what the benefits were to using pesticides in the City of Leduc, participants across both groups mentioned that pesticides are more cost effective than mowing or hand-pulling weeds. Minimizing the spread of weeds, particularly in areas where people play such as parks and sports fields was seen as important to many participants. Using pesticides makes it easier to maintain these areas.

A couple of environmental group respondents were supportive of the City using pesticides, as long as this occurred on windless days, using proper techniques, and it was properly communicated with residents when the spraying will occur.

Concerns Regarding Pesticide Usage

In general, there were no major concerns across either group with the City's pest control practices on City property, however, a couple applicators mentioned that the City could be doing more to combat weeds on City property. One environmental group participant mentioned that the products used in the Telford Lake area had a headache-inducing smell.

With regards to personal application of pesticides, most pesticide applicators did not have concerns. A couple of applicators were concerned that some residents may be over-applying pesticides on their lawns. Environmental group participants shared these concerns and believed that more needs to be done to educate residents on how to use pesticides safely and effectively.

"When it comes to the general homeowner- they don't know timing, what to use and when. Application makes a huge difference. We see potential customers damage their lawn using Roundup."

- Pesticide Applicator

Potential Cosmetic Pesticide Ban

Participants were asked to rate their level of opposition/support for a potential ban on cosmetic or non-essential pesticide use on residential and commercial property in the City of Leduc using a 1 to 5 scale where 1 meant 'strongly oppose' and 5 meant 'strongly support.' All pesticide applicators provided a rating of 1 or 2 out of 5. Environmental group respondents were mixed, with 3 respondents strongly supporting a ban, 1 respondent strongly opposing, and 2 respondents providing a rating of 3 out of 5.

The main reason for opposition across both groups was the difficulty of enforcement, as residents will be able to travel outside of the City to purchase pesticides. Many participants also noted that the potential ban is too broad, and many people will have different interpretations on what constitutes a 'cosmetic' species versus a noxious or invasive species. Even those who strongly supported a ban on cosmetic pesticides specified that noxious weeds should still be sprayed.

Don't make a law if you can't enforce it. If they can go to the store and buy it, how can you monitor and enforce that?

- Environmental Group Participant

Potential Cosmetic Pesticide Ban

Participants were then asked how likely they would be to comply with a potential ban on cosmetic pesticides. Most applicators were a 5 out of 5 (very likely), saying that they wouldn't have a choice if they wanted to continue to operate in the City. A few mentioned that they would no longer operate in the City if a ban was to occur. One said that his business would comply with the ban, but he would still use pesticides on his personal property.

4 out of 5 environmental group respondents were very likely to comply with a potential ban on cosmetic pesticides (ratings of 5 out of 5). These respondents mentioned they would keep weeds under control through alternative pest control methods. One respondent provided a rating of 2 out of 5 – stating that it would depend on what pesticides were banned.

> *"If we had to pivot- the costs for alternative are five times more and less than half as effective. Our sole intention is making a healthy lawn. Healthy lawn reduces weeds. If you have a healthy lawn, you probably don't need to spray."*
>
> - Pesticide Applicator

> *"The products we use have been in usage since 1945. They're reviewed every year and there is no solid report saying it's detrimental to children's health. I wouldn't do this if I thought there was a problem with the products we're using."*
>
> - Pesticide Applicator

Educational Campaigns

Next, participants were asked if they would support a City-wide educational campaign around how to **use pesticides effectively**. Applicators were mixed on their support for this initiative. A couple of participants strongly supported this, while one participant rated their support as a 1 out of 5 – stating that pesticide application should be left to professionals. A couple of applicators rated their support as a 3 out of 5, saying that it would depend on the messaging implemented. Most of the environmental group participants were in support of this.

When asked what should be included in a campaign like this, responses included how to safely use pesticides, what type of pesticide to use on each type of pest, how often to spray, and how to store the products. A couple of pesticide applicators indicated that professional pesticide applicators could collaborate with the City and run workshops on these topics for residents.

Educational Campaigns

The majority of participants would support a a City-wide educational campaign around **alternatives to pesticides.** When asked what should be included in a campaign like this, responses included proper mowing techniques, how to pull weeds correctly to remove the roots, how to make dandelion tea, and how to disinfect gardening equipment to prevent the spread of plant fungus or disease. One participant mentioned that residents should be aware that pesticide alternatives like salt, vinegar, and dish soap can also be harmful to the environment if not used correctly. One participant suggested that the City could create an “adopt a park” program where residents can learn about these pesticide alternatives and apply what they have learned to these parks.

Final Comments

When asked for final comments, pesticide applicators reiterated that they do not want to see a cosmetic pesticide ban in the City of Leduc. Many environmental group respondents were open to spraying as a last resort and there needs to be a balance between chemical applications and alternative methods to ensure Leduc green spaces remain beautiful.

I feel it's a money making racket from pesticide applicators…It's overdone in my area and it's toxic.

- Environmental Group Participant

"We protect pollinators- we don't use any neonicotinoids, we won't reduce the bee population."

- Pesticide Applicator

Make sure the decision is based on the science. Edmonton just considered this and defeated this, Manitoba repealed it after it not working for a few years.

- Environmental Group Participant