

Pesticides a no no in Balerno – and elsewhere

A [petition](#) to stop Edinburgh spraying Glyphosate on our city's streets has been the inspiration for a similar campaign in Balerno and fledgling movements in Portobello.

Jessica Windsor began the Pesticide Free Edinburgh campaign. She explained her view that pesticide use has multiple harmful effects on human and animal health causing environmental pollution.

She said: “The notorious chemical Glyphosate is used here in Edinburgh and has been linked to cancer in humans and animals (has recently been in the news with landmark lawsuits in the USA with thousands more awaiting trial). Direct contact with any pesticide can cause acute short term health problems such as respiratory tract irritation, allergic sensitisation, nausea/vomiting/diarrhoea, seizures, headache and loss of consciousness.

“Children are more at risk than adults due to their age and also their behaviour, for example, investigating nature, crawling and playing on grass and spending time in areas such as playgrounds and parks where pesticides are used. Dogs and cats are particularly vulnerable too due to their close proximity to the ground. Pesticides have also been shown to have a damaging effect on bee populations and other pollinators which are currently in steep decline and need all

the help they can get.”

Residents in Cherrytree Balerno successfully petitioned the council earlier this year to stop using glyphosate in their area because of the health risks. The council confirmed that they would trial a ‘Foamstream ‘ weed control system instead.

Annie Macdonald of Pesticide Free Balerno, which now has 580 signatures, explained that they were delighted by the council’s response. She said: “We were relieved that the council listened to the communities health concerns in Balerno, safeguarding those with vulnerable immune and respiratory health issues like asthma -crucial now more than ever.

“We were chosen as a key case study for a crucial report written by The Wildlife Trusts and esteemed Author and Professor Dave Goulson illustrating how communities can take action and effect change supporting biodiversity and insect recovery.”

Now they have literally taken matters into their own hands by starting up Volunteer Weeding Groups who remove the weeds manually or individually outside their own property or street to help the council, along with crucial public support to effect environmental change and health support. Annie explained there are many benefits to what they are doing: “Our Volunteer Weeding group is sponsored by our local Scotmid and we have been removing weeds manually in the community this year to support the council moving towards safe alternatives.

“During this time we have had to be flexible and creative working around volunteers availability, location availability, commitments and government guidelines on social distancing and number of household limitations. Also the weather. Although Manual weeding can be done anytime and in any weather with minimal equipment -unlike Glyphosate which cannot be used in rain or wind-handy for Scotland.

“People out on daily walks are engaging by noticing our efforts and results and they call over with their thanks and encouragement

We are making people smile and connect from a distance as well as receiving positive online feedback. It is very encouraging and satisfying to do something positive at this time that can lift people’s spirits and connect us all as a community.”

























Green MSP Alison Johnstone said: “I share the concerns you have raised about the impact of pesticides and have been pushing The Scottish Government and Local Authorities to end their use for some time now. I receive regular correspondence from constituents concerned about glyphosate which demonstrates the strength of feeling that exists about ongoing use.

“I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment shortly after the election in 2016, urging that glyphosate use be stopped. In the letter attached, you will see that I asked

what plans the Scottish Government had in place to:

(1) immediately prohibit the use of glyphosate in areas such as public parks and gardens, sports and recreation grounds, school grounds and children's playgrounds and in the close vicinity of healthcare facilities, in line with new EU regulations;

(2) publish a clear, time-bound commitment to phasing out entirely the use of glyphosate across Scotland.

"The time for a 'phasing out' approach has been and gone. Action must be taken to stop glyphosate being sprayed in Edinburgh's communities. In the absence of government action I called on The City of Edinburgh Council to get rid of glyphosate based weedkillers last year.

"Having raised the concerns of Balerno residents in the Scottish Parliament, I was delighted that their campaign succeeded in convincing City of Edinburgh Council to halt glyphosate use in the area this summer, though I do believe the evidence of the unsuitability of glyphosate is already clear enough to inform funding decisions without the need of a trial run."

Cllr Susan Webber who represents Pentland Hills Ward said: "At the Transport & Environment Committee in February it was agreed that no glyphosate would be used in Balerno for this coming growing season. A deep street clean was planned for March as this would remove much of the growing medium for weeds.

"This was another activity that fell foul of the lockdown. So it's now solely Pesticide Free Balerno who are taking on the task of weed removal across Balerno.

"It is an admirable project and one that is proving to be demanding of time and commitment from the small group of volunteers. I know that when the community understand the

scale of the task in hand and benefits of this approach to weed management then the support will be forthcoming. I do hope that the group accepts the offers of the support from council offers to assist with tools. planning and the uplifting the waste as this will be critical to provide the assurance the council and the Local Councillors need to support this on an ongoing basis.”

CITY CENTRE WEEDS

It’s not just in the suburbs that weed control is an issue. City centre resident, Lorna, said: “I was horrified to see the council out spraying near Dublin Street. We were walking by with our two small children who were put at risk of breathing in the cancer causing pesticide chemicals, and I am disgusted that the council would allow this to happen.

“It is irresponsible, dangerous and against our human rights to have these chemicals sprayed around the city centre. I raised my concerns with the council and these have been completely ignored.

“Councils and cities all over the world are banning its use, due to concerns the chemical can lead to non-Hodgkins Lymphoma and other health issues, water and soil pollution and can impact the health of important insects e.g. bees. The City of Edinburgh Council continues to be a dinosaur when it comes to environmental issues with minimal EV car charging points, few bike lanes, and clearing trees left right and centre, it is a disgrace.”

Lorna explained that Bayer who own Monsanto (the owners of Roundup) have agreed to pay more than \$10 billion to settle thousands of lawsuits against them that claim the chemical causes cancer. Bayer currently have over 125,000 cases against them and she believes that the council should also be worried about the legal consequences, particularly from their staff, who are being directly exposed.

Council policy

The City of Edinburgh Council say that their current approach to weed treatment is in line with what was agreed by the Transport and Environment Committee in February this year.

In broad terms, the Council remains committed to moving to cost effective methods of weed treatment, but to campaigners it is taking a painfully long time to do anything about it. They are using quad bikes with tanks of pesticide on the back to apply the weedkiller to the city's streets saying that this significantly improves the efficiency of application. They acknowledge that in the report by the International Agency for Research on Cancer glyphosate was determined as 'a probable human carcinogen', although that claim is countered by the European Food Safety Authority who say it is safe.

The council has been discussing alternatives to the weedkiller since November 2016, and in October 2017 they agreed to introduce an Integrated Weed Control Programme such as flame-throwers and mechanical tools. They say that in the parks under their control they have introduced more mulching, a natural way of controlling weeds, so that they can avoid using weedkillers.

They say that options were to be considered and they were to look at a larger trial of an alternative to glyphosate in the spring/summer of 2021 – subject to approval of a budget to do so in the 21/22 budget.

Some of this work has fallen foul of the pandemic, as most area will only receive one application of weed killer and not two as is usual. Parks and greenspace staff are concentrating on grass cutting at sheltered housing and care homes instead.

Year	Amount of glyphosate based herbicide used (in litres)
2019	3180

2018	2580
2017	2175
2016	4560

The council claims the increase in usage is due to the weather, particularly the rain in 2019.

While some may be unsightly, weeds are also said to be part of the biodiversity in the city. The Edinburgh Living Landscape initiative recognises the biodiversity benefits from leaving some weeds in place. ELL are running a Vision Survey on Edinburgh's Parks and Green Spaces, rivers, lochs and shoreline in 2020 [here](#).

Councillor Lesley Macinnes, Transport and Environment Convener said: "In terms of controlling weeds generally, we take an integrated approach and have greatly reduced our use of glyphosate-based herbicides by using a variety of methods, such as deep cleansing streets, mulching, strimming and hoeing.

"We have also trialled a number of glyphosate-alternative herbicides, hot water and hot foam, and ultimately plan to move away from using glyphosate-based herbicides when an effective and financially viable alternative is found, however for the moment they remain the most effective treatment on roads, pavements and other hard surfaces."

[su_spoiler class="my-custom-spoiler" title="More information about Edinburgh Living Landscape" style="simple"]Edinburgh Living Landscape is led by The City of Edinburgh Council along with [greenspace scotland](#), Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust ([ELGT](#)), [OPENspace](#) based at The University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt , [Edinburgh Green Spaces Forum](#) and [Scottish Wildlife Trust](#).[/su_spoiler]