

Integrated Pest Management

Information About the City of Seattle's Landscape Management Practices

What is Integrated Pest Management?

While most plants and wildlife co-exist peacefully within our landscapes, these habitats also include pest species which spread out and take over the landscapes. Pests can be insects, plant diseases, invasive weeds, animals or birds. Pests disrupt the natural ecology of a habitat and landscape, creating an unhealthy environment for plants and sometimes for humans and pets.

Since the late 1970's the City of Seattle has used a method called Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to maintain healthy landscapes. IPM is a comprehensive strategy which prioritizes preventative non-chemical methods to reduce pests such as thoughtful plant selection, using mulch to reduce weeds and build soil health, and hand weeding and other non-chemical techniques. In IPM, pesticides are used sparingly as a last resort in targeted applications by trained professionals.

Why use pesticides at all?

- State and county regulations require control of noxious weeds. Certain types of weeds, such as Japanese Knotweed, cannot be controlled with hand-weeding, machine removal, or insect predators.
- We spend millions of dollars investing in our living landscape assets. If left uncontrolled, aggressive weeds routinely outcompete the existing plants at that site and greatly reduce biodiversity.
- We occasionally use pesticides to protect valuable specimens subject to diseases, such as historical cherry trees.
- As part the City's long-term plan to restore 2,500 acres of urban forest by 2025, we have intensified restoration efforts in the past few years. The initial phases of restoration include more intensive weed control.
- Golf course putting greens are highly susceptible to fungal diseases. If those fungal diseases take hold, the putting greens can be destroyed, requiring expensive replacement.

Where are pesticides not used in Seattle?

- Seattle Parks and Recreation maintains 22 pesticide-free parks throughout the city.
- SPR manages over 250 landscapes without pesticides, including within 25 feet of children's playgrounds, water features, picnic areas and shelters, and community food gardens.
- In addition, all lawns, athletic fields and other turf areas in Seattle's parks are maintained without pesticides.

How does the City ensure pesticide use is safe?

- Pesticides can be safely applied when used in accordance with the label and when applied by licensed applicators. All applicators are required to go through annual recertification.
- Staff are trained in safe pesticide application, and they always wear protective clothing.
- Areas where pesticide is applied are well posted to advise the public of the application.
- An IPM interdepartmental team, including community advocates, reviews the use of pesticides to ensure they are being used in a safe and appropriate way.

What does the IPM Executive Order do?

- Moves pesticides containing glyphosate to the most restricted category (Tier 1) immediately, prohibiting their use until an exception process is followed through the interdepartmental team.
- Directs City departments with land management responsibilities to identify a staff to be on the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) interdepartmental team (IDT).
- Directs City departments to follow the IPM program developed by the IDT.
- Directs the IDT to update the IPM program by December 31, 2019.
- Directs the IDT to review and update the pesticide database and make it accessible to the public.
- Directs the IDT to develop a web portal for the IPM program.

Why further restrict glyphosate now?

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) at the World Health Organization and the State of California recently categorized glyphosate as a probable carcinogen to humans. Under the current IPM program, this listing triggers a review process to reclassify such pesticides.

What will the City do in lieu of using glyphosate?

In applications where glyphosate was previously used, the City will reassess using the IPM methodology and seek non-chemical means to manage noxious weeds. This may include increase mulching in garden beds and around trees, flame weeding and hot foam for hardscapes, natural pesticide products.

Alternative pesticides such as triclopyr and imazapyr have been used by some jurisdictions, and these will be evaluated by the IPM IDT to assess whether they are a proper substitute.

Are there other pesticides that will be further restricted as part of this update?

The City's IPM IDT will review the current list of pesticides to determine the need for further restrictions. This process will build off existing work conducted by San Francisco and other agencies using a risk-reduction model.

Where are pesticides currently used by the City?

- locations of noxious weed infestations
- golf course putting greens
- forest restoration projects
- landscape renovation projects
- shrub beds
- greenhouses
- hardscapes and gravel paths
- rights-of-way and roadside plantings

How does the exception process work?

Pesticides in the most restricted category (currently Tier 1) are prohibited from general use. When a department has tried other methods in the IPM program and finds a need for the use of Tier 1 product, they must bring their request for exception to the IPM IDT. This peer review group will review the request, confirm if there are other viable options available, and may approve a specific or programmatic exception by a majority vote of the IDT members. There is formal documentation of this process for all exceptions.