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### Concerns prompt Lane County to re-evaluate use of herbicides

By Matt Cooper The Register-Guard  
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Lane County will reconsider whether to resume using herbicides next year to combat roadside weeds, following concerns voiced Wednesday by commissioners and residents about the health risks of the chemicals.

The county board of commissioners directed an advisory committee to review the advisory panel's slim vote of support for the first use of herbicides along county-owned roads in four years. The committee could report back to the board as soon as January.

Lane County's use of herbicides to battle weeds and brush on roadsides and other locations has been a periodic source of controversy. Residents pushed the county to sharply reduce herbicide use, and the county adopted a policy to use the chemicals only as a last resort.

Vegetation Management Coordinator Orin Schumacher said the road department considers itself now to be in a last-resort situation given manpower cutbacks, the onset of especially damaging weeds and the failure of other methods.

Under the staff's proposal, herbicides would be used to maintain areas around guardrails, remove weeds growing in road cracks, clear areas along new roads and control harmful weeds.

Without herbicides, for example, the county has no strategy to fight yellow starthistle, a tough weed that has appeared locally and which has ruined 10 million acres of California grassland, Schumacher said.

Commissioner Bobby Green on Wednesday said he supports limited use of herbicides, adding that other methods don't appear effective.

But Commissioner Faye Stewart asked for more information on where the herbicides would be applied, and Commissioner Bill Dwyer rejected the notion that herbicides should be used simply because other methods cost more.

"There are many health costs associated with chemicals that have not been quantified," Dwyer said.

Commissioner Bill Fleenor, a member of the advisory committee, said he hopes to bridge a possible "chasm" between committee members on opposite sides of the herbicide issue.

The board heard from two people who support limited use of herbicides — Judy

Templeton of Lane County Women for Agriculture, and horticulturalist Ross Penhallegon of the OSU Lane County Extension Service, which provides programs in agriculture, nutrition and other areas.

But most speakers opposed the use of herbicides, arguing that the chemicals are too dangerous and alternatives haven't been exhausted.

Jan Wroncy, a former herbicide advisory committee member, said there should be more review of the costs of other methods and funding sources for them.

"It's not my belief that the county has given (all alternatives to herbicides) a real serious trial," she said.

The committee might also review whether the county should battle noxious weeds and whether the Lane County sheriff's department can provide inmates to remove roadside weeds.

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