

KITCHENER FACES \$110,000 SOD BILL TO FIX DEAD FIELDS

By Joe Sinasac
Record Staff

Replacing the drought-stricken grass in Kitchener's major sports fields could cost more than \$110,000 this year.

Tom Clancy, director of parks and property, made the estimate Thursday after Waterloo regional council rejected pleas by him and parks commissioner Fred Graham's plea to let the city do some watering.

"We have not experienced a drought like we have now," Clancy told reporters.

He estimated that replacing sod on 11 of the city's most used soccer fields would cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 apiece.

"We certainly have a problem, and it's going to cost dearly to replace these fields," Graham told regional councillors earlier.

"Some of our sports fields are dead, period."

Waterloo Region, along with much of Canada and the American Midwest, has been suffering through one of the worst droughts since the 1930s. A regional lawn-watering ban entered its 47th day today. Since May 22 only 44 millimeters of rain have fallen.

The average rainfall for the three months of May, June and July is 230 mm.

Heavy thunderstorms that were predicted for Wednesday and Thursday bypassed most of the region to the south. Storms were reported in Ayr, Brantford and Hamilton, but the weather office at Waterloo-Guelph Regional Airport recorded only 0.2 mm of rainfall at Breslau. Showers, however, are forecast for tonight after midnight and Saturday.

Combined with not summer temperatures, the drought has frayed the nerves of residents, who in growing numbers have snitched on their neighbors for violating the lawn-watering ban. Some homeowners lucky enough to have wells on the property have taken to erecting signs to inform passers-by of that fact and plead with them not to call police when they see the sprinklers on.

And there is no end to the ban in sight.

In light of these conditions, regional councillors loudly denounced the Kitchener request to water sports-fields, saying it would undermine the conservation efforts the region has been making.

"We've got an extensive education program going on now to teach people how to conserve water," said Mary Jane Mewhinney, a Waterloo councillor.

"I really think there is a lot of nerve in the staff people from the City of Kitchener coming along and ruining these efforts . . ."

Fred Kent, a Cambridge representative on council, said most of the region's residents would resent seeing water sprinkled on playing fields when their own lawns are shrivelling in the heat.

"To grant any exception (to the ban) now would, I think, be doing the citizens a disservice," Kent said.

But Ald. Don Travers, a Kitchener representative, argued that lawns couldn't be equated with the playing fields, which represent a substantial investment to taxpayers.

The playing fields in question — four at Budd park, two at Woodside park, three at Breithaupt park and two at Centennial stadium — are each used by about 800 people each week. Such heavy use makes the

fields more susceptible to heavy damage from drought, Graham said.

Kitchener's Ald. Jim Ziegler said the fields represent a business — "the sports business" — and should therefore be treated differently than lawns.

To salvage the fields, Kitchener officials banned soccer games indefinitely July 6 and are considering expanding the ban to baseball diamonds.

The officials also fear that many recently planted trees are doomed if no rain falls soon and they've asked residents to water city-planted trees in front of their houses when it's their day for watering flower gardens.

Even the heavy rain Sunday and Monday was not enough to relieve the water-starved fields, Clancy said. The ground had been baked so hard during the previous weeks that much of the water simply drained away.

Clancy said the city planned to water the fields about once every two weeks in the early morning hours, just enough to keep the grass alive.

While seeding the fields would be somewhat cheaper than sod, doing so would put those fields out of commission for a year, Clancy said. If the fields are re-sodded in September, they will be ready for use in spring.

He added that a University of Guelph expert had told him grass can remain dormant during a drought for up to eight weeks, and "we're in our eighth week now."

Council voted against the request 19-4, with the only supporters being Kitchener's Mayor Dom Cardillo and Aldermen Travers, Jim Ziegler and Gary Leadston.