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Forest Ecologist Studies

Herbicides Residues

A professor of forest ecology at Penn State University has determined that herbicides applied to clay soils do a better job of controlling unwanted grasses and broadleaf weeds than when applied to either sandy loam soils or clay loams.

Dr. Robert D. Shipman reports that this may be true because of the higher organic matter and microbial breakdown in the surface layers of sandy loams and clay loams of central Pennsylvania soils.

On soils where poverty grass, Kentucky bluegrass, and timothy are dominant, water movement and herbicide availability is more rapid throughout the entire soil profile on clay soils. However, surface runoff was also greater on the heavier clay soils, Shipman and his associates have demonstrated.

The persistence of residues and lateral movement of 11 soil-applied herbicides was influenced by degree of slope, rate of application, amount of rainfall, kind and extent of vegetation, and the herbicide's ease of dissolving in water.

In studies during the growing seasons of 1969 and 1970, the average distance that 9 herbicides moved through clay soil was 16 feet on an average slope of 7 percent. The longest distance moved was 35 feet on a 7 percent slope, which occurred with Tandex wettable powder. The least flow or drift occurred with a granuular mixture of picloram and diuron which moved only 10 feet on a 13 percent slope.

The most effective herbicides for total control of vegetation were bromacil wettable powder, Tandex in granular form, Tandex in wettable powder, and picloram plus diuron mixture.

Eighteen months after application the herbicide bromacil—the most effective of all 11 weed killers tested —showed insignificant residues in clay. The other herbicides left only slight traces after 18 months.

In trials with seedling trees planted on treated plots, the clay soils showed the least herbicidal effect on Japanese larch and hybrid poplars. Both the larches and the poplars survived better on clay soils than on sandy loams and clay loams. Clay and clay loams showed better height growth than the loamy sand sites. Plots treated with diuron showed the best growth in height for both the larches and the poplars.

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