



Missoula, Mont. kicks around pesticide regulations

Pesticide issue on Missoula ballot

Will the homeowners in this western Montana mountain city approve a pesticide posting law...for themselves?

■ Uhm, should we build a new baseball park?

Or should we make lawn care companies—anybody, in fact, who applies pesticides to more than 50 square feet of property at one time—post 80-square-inch yellow or orange warning signs?

These are the two questions voters of Missoula, Mont., decide this month.

If you're betting the \$3.5 million baseball bond issue generated more debate and controversy—bingo, you win!

"The fact that the city council decided to put baseball on the ballot went on the front page," says Don Baty, local government reporter for *The Missoulian*. "The pesticide ordinance story, I think, went on page 3."

Not that the pesticide posting proposal hadn't been kicked around city council chambers long enough: it had. It fermented in council's Conservation Committee for almost a year before being hauled out

(much amended) for a mid-August airing.

When council deadlocked 6-6 on the proposed ordinance, Mayor Daniel Kemmis, rather than cast the crucial vote, asked the people of Missoula to decide—while they're voting on the bond issue for a ballpark which, some townfolk hope, will attract a minor league baseball team.

At various committee and public hearings, posting advocates and industry representatives (primarily lawn care representatives) debated the pesticide posting issue.

"The hearings were pretty well attended, but there weren't any overflow crowds either," Baty tells *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*.

The ordinance finally emerging for the ballot would, if passed, require *anybody* applying pesticides to 50 square feet or more of property within the city to post signs 24 hours prior to the application and remove them 48 hours after.

Spot spraying (less than 50 square feet) and emergency spraying need not be posted, according to the ordinance.

Greg Amsden, a spokesman for Mont PIRG (Public Interest Research Group), defends the size and color of the signs. He says they should be recognizable by children and contain a "Mr. Yuck" caricature on them along with appropriate warning language.

Mont PIRG is an advocacy organization at the University of Montana directed by elected student representatives. Mont PIRG maintains a professional staff.

Most of the burden for posting, assuming the ordinance passes, is the homeowner's, says Amsden, adding that posting proponents realized it would create a hardship for lawn application companies to visit each property 24 hours prior to an application.

Apart from the cost to applicators,

Citizens not happy about posting vote

■ Missoula (Mont.) homeowners don't want pesticide posting, not as it appears on the ballot, anyway.

A poll conducted by Sage Advertising, Helena, Mont., early in October showed almost 65 percent of the voters opposing it. Sage had been hired by the green industry to help defeat the issue appearing on the Nov. 5 ballot.

"I think we're going to win," says John Bass, a longtime Missoula LCO. "I think a lot of our support is coming from the city's lawn care customers."

Five weeks before the vote RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) said it would help defeat the proposal. "RISE cannot fight all local ordinances, but we have chosen Missoula because it...can be used as a precedent in other areas," says Allen James, RISE executive director.

"A victory will indicate that the public does not want these restrictive regulations," adds James.

Bass says he doesn't necessarily oppose right-to-know. "But with these people (proposal supporters) that's just the beginning," he says, adding that anti-pesticide activists had already been successful in stopping the use of control products on the grounds at the University of Montana and in city parks.

He says RISE's help is allowing a local industry-based political action committee mount a citizen education campaign to offset anti-pesticide advertising.

Missoula is often windy in the spring and early summer when most pesticide applications take place and applicators sometimes don't know from day to day if they can spray.

"In the course of a year we've arrived at quite a few compromises, actually," Amsden says of the ordinance.

—Ron Hall