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> Use of glyphosate has been a hot topic for contractors and their clients since the registration of this active ingredient was extended in the summer

Glyphosate is an important part of the weed control armoury for sports venues and public spaces, but has proved controversial this year. We look at the current situation and how the industry is aiming to move forward

Glyphosate

Spraying in control

Since the extension of registration of glyphosate for the next eighteen months was agreed in the summer, there has been a flurry of conflicting news stories and opinions about how products containing the active ingredient may or may not be used in groundcare. But a look at the legislation shows that little has actually changed.

The EU Commission Implementing Regulation on glyphosate issued on 1st August 2016 stated: Member States must pay particular attention to the risks from the use in specified areas referred to in Article 12 (a) of Directive 2009/128/EC (The Sustainable Use Directive or SUD).

Specified areas in UK legislation are defined as: "includes areas used by the general public, vulnerable groups, areas in the close vicinity of healthcare facilities as well as conservation areas, areas close to groundwater, sealed surfaces and recently treated areas accessible to agricultural workers".

Monsanto Technical Manager Manda Sansom comments: "This may be interpreted as suggesting a ban should be imposed in the specific areas. However, the SUD is implemented locally in each Member State, so the interpretation may differ."

"Here in the UK, the Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012 do not include the word 'prohibited'. The relevant wording, also included in the National Action Plan for the UK, is 'that the amount used and the frequency of use are as low as reasonably practicable'. The Chemicals Regulation Directorate does not anticipate any change to its current approach.

Also of relevance to the amenity sector, the Regulation also requested Member States to ensure glyphosate products do not contain tallowamine surfactants. This will result in the phasing out of products containing tallowamine, but Monsanto amenity Roundup products have been tallowamine-free since 2014.

Suggestions that glyphosate is banned or is about to be banned in Europe are also wide of the mark, points out Manda.

"Restrictions on glyphosate use in amenity areas have so far only been actioned by Slovakia and Italy. Slovakia has withdrawn all non-agricultural uses, except railways, drainage and irrigation channels (aquatic) and forestry. In Italy, glyphosate use on sandy soils is forbidden and there is a requirement for details from the SUD to be added to glyphosate product labels."

"In Spain, there is also a proposal to add some information from the SUD to the labels, but this has yet to be finalised."

Before any of these new restrictions appeared, and independent of the glyphosate discussions, several countries already had restrictions in place. However, these restrictions apply to all pesticides used in amenity situations and not just glyphosate.

The high media profile of glyphosate during the re-registration period has understandably led to concern among amenity managers and local authorities. Leading amenity contractor Complete Weed Control's Alan Abel comments: "We have had many discussions with our clients about glyphosate, but they and we understand that we cannot do without it."

"Our job is to use glyphosate in the safest way possible - we have been using the Weed-IT spot spraying system since 1997 as the most sustainable way of applying glyphosate to hard surfaces, and it is now a legal requirement."

Alan points out that all contractors and amenity sprayer operators using glyphosate should only do so in accordance with SUD and the chemical manufacturer's label recommendations.

"Using spot treatment ensures that a tiny amount of product is applied to the leaf only, and minimises risks."

He adds that local authority clients are also revising their spray schedules to minimise chemical use: "Local authority cutbacks meant that some councils were reducing the number of sprays, but this actually necessitated the use of higher chemical doses to control the additional weed growth. By making three applications a year, rather than two, it is possible to reduce the overall chemical volumes needed."

The Amenity Forum is the voluntary initiative for the amenity sector recognised by Government as the industry body for promoting best practice in weed, pest and disease control. Chairman John Moverley suggests that contractors join the Amenity Forum.

"This demonstrates to the public and clients their commitment to best practice. More external tenders for amenity work are now requiring contractors to be part of the Forum."

"I would secondly urge professionals to demonstrate that they are fully operating to Amenity Assured standards, and ideally are accredited by BASIS Registration."

He explains: "Holding the Amenity Assured standard remains voluntary for now, but



Alan Abel, Complete Weed Control

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John Moverley, Amenity Forum

again we are seeing more clients seeking this in tenders. Even if not carrying the standard, groundcare professionals should be able to demonstrate that they are at that level if asked."

Thirdly, it is vital that the organisation can demonstrate compliance with the law, Professor Moverley adds.

"Whilst many features of the National Action Plan remain voluntary, there are legal requirements which must be followed - sprayer testing, recognised certification for all pesticide operators and legal responsibility on any person purchasing pesticides to ensure they are used by certificated operators."

Even where measures may currently be voluntary, there is expectation that the sector will adopt them, he points out - for example, having an integrated weed and pest management plan is not legally required, but expected, as is regular checking of knapsack sprayers etc., he points out.

"The Forum would never advocate for any weed control method which is proven unsafe. The current review processes are extremely rigorous and testing, and those pesticides currently available are constantly monitored and properly reviewed. If only all domestic products such as bleaches and cleaners went through the same process."

"It is equally important for the public to recognise that professionals use integrated approaches to weed control involving cultural, non-chemical and chemical approaches. Glyphosate is widely used across the sector for its effectiveness."

The Amenity Forum recently launched the Get Moving campaign to highlight how proper weed control impacts upon health and well-being, safety and the environment, featuring a range of public information materials which can be distributed to their customers by contractors and local authorities. For details visit *www.amenityforum.co.uk/getmoving*

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