



Round Table 1

Pesticide Free Towns

Frontrunners to inspire others on sustainable urban development

Participants:

Dan Slotmakers – Flemish Region

Denis Godeaux (Focal Point Pesticides and Environment) for the Walloon administration and Frédéric Jomaux (Walloon pole for differentiated management) – Walloon region

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Public: Representatives from municipalities and civil society

The round table started with the presentation of the participants, who also explained what the regional administrations propose to municipalities to switch to 0 pesticide use and also the problems they have with the municipalities who would like to get too many derogations or have difficulties to switch to 0 pesticide use. These presentations can be viewed on :

<http://www.pan-europe.info/what-we-do/conferences/conference-belgium-moving-towards-pesticide-free-towns>

Discussion: Questions and answers

The EU directive on sustainable use of pesticides mainly relates to pesticides, but are member states implementation also covering use of biocides regarding public areas?

Pesticides include two categories of products:

- Plant protection products, which are used either to protect plants (insecticides, fungicides, molluscicides), or to destroy them (herbicides);
- Biocide products, which are not used in relation with plants, but in many areas: disinfection (for human or veterinary hygiene, surface disinfection, drinking water, etc), products against pests (mosquitoes, mites, ants, rats, etc), products to protect specific materials (wood, concrete, stone, textiles, etc), but also products used for taxidermy and embalming.

These two categories of products are covered by different European Regulations, but the pesticides Directive only covers plant protection products.

At federal level however, there is a commitment to progress on biocides too.

However, in Brussels and Wallonia the regional legislation makes the link with the Directive which is limited to plant protection products. Biocides are not covered.

In the Flemish Region, the word pesticide covers plant protection products and biocides and both categories are covered by the Flemish legislation.

How expensive is mechanical and thermal equipment and are there providers in Europe?

The cost of machines can vary from de 150 to 150,000 euros. Generally Municipalities think first about ways to reduce the area to be weeded and then they chose the machinery. Each

municipality is different and has preferences in terms of machines.

On the roads, it is generally advisable to go for mechanical weeding, because it is faster. On smaller areas, less accessible, thermal weeding is better because more efficient.

In Wallonia as well as in Flanders, there are providers of machinery for all the techniques. For thermal weeding, the following techniques are available, among others: hot water, hot foam, direct flame, infrared light, hot air... For mechanical action there are various sorts of brushes (metal or nylon), other mechanical systems such as track planers for gravel paths,...

The biggest problem for municipalities is how to choose the machines and their price. There is no subvention from the region, although sometimes there is some aid from the provinces to buy material.

Railway companies are the biggest users of pesticides outside the agricultural sector in a number of member states. What amount of pesticides is used by railway companies in Belgium, and how is their consumption of pesticides dealt with?

In the Flemish Region, railway tracks are still a problem. Railway companies use the most pesticides in the Flemish Region. The main reason for removing vegetation is maintaining safety of the tracks. This argument has been stated by the UIC, the international union of railways. Because of dense traffic on Flemish railways the only viable option is to use pesticides. Camera-detection of weeds on the tracks allows for selective application of pesticides. Alternative methods do not work fast enough and require a higher frequency.

The security strips along the rail tracks are also treated. A spreader detects the vegetation by infrared and activates the spreading. When the technique works, plants which are growing in the wrong place are destroyed. But when the spreader goes over a river, a bridge or a level crossing where people could stand, the spreading goes on.

In the Brussels region, there is currently no derogation possible for railway companies in the legislation, but the Belgium Railway company Infrabel is exposed to security problems at ballast level as well as in relation to signs and logging roads. This should be solved with the implementation plan. In Wallonia, there is currently tolerance to treat ballasts and security roads. The GPS system used for spraying makes it possible to identify risk areas (such as a water course, a bridge or a crossing over and to stop the spaying).

Are towns in Belgium promoting the move towards 0 pesticide towns as a 'tourist attraction'?

Awareness raising and communication are very important to implement the directive, especially among local citizens. In Wallonia, the pesticide free week is a very important tool of communication, also for end users.

Flanders organises a number of awareness raising events, with the latest example being organising local walks to make garden owners see the link to using pesticides in their garden to local drinking water reservoirs.

Currently the rules in the Brussels region are mainly for public managers, while the public awareness raising is starting.

Circular economy also represents an opportunity to communicate on this topic: short chains are supported and land is given to create collective vegetable gardens, providing that people do not use pesticides.

Finally the nature plan gives priority to biodiversity, thus management without pesticides and

is a way to raise awareness towards the whole society.

Is the move towards using alternatives rather than pesticide more expensive for the towns?

In Flanders, the cost argument is one of the arguments that can be used to obtain a derogation on the pesticide ban. This cost should be well motivated. This argument cannot be used in areas protected for the production of drinking water. Flanders gave municipalities 10 years for the transition, so they have had 10 years to stop using pesticides and start a new management system. In practice there are a number of opinions on the cost of pesticide free management. Some municipalities claim to have no higher costs whilst others claim to use up to 5 times the budget they previously spent.

When speaking about the costs of pesticides also important to highlight the health costs and water treatment costs should be considered within the cost of pesticides. And design is essential in making sure you are not dependent from pesticides.

Do alternatives exist for all pesticides?

A representative from the city of Liège explains that they understand the challenges, but they have a big problem with Japanese knotweed, which, despite being treated with pesticides in the city area, continues to spread, also due to the introduction of contaminated earth. However, no alternative has been found so far. What solution is available?

The Walloon authorities have set the 0 pesticide objective on 1st June 2019 for public space managers, but there are several exemptions, which concern three thistle species, two dock species which are a problem for farmers, and invasive alien species. For those, it is still possible to apply pesticides, as last resort, when there is no alternative solution, such as for Japanese knotweed.

International Biocontrol Manufacturer Association questioned that pesticides are still needed in sport fields. There are very good solutions to control fungus in grass and nematodes in wood. People are managing football and rugby fields, and golf courses very well without pesticides, and there are many examples of pesticide free sport fields all over Europe already from others to learn from.

Pesticides are already prohibited on sport fields since 1984 in Wallonia but this is often ignored by the managers. It is confirmed in the framework directive. There are alternative, non-chemical solutions, but there is a need to raise public awareness to communicate the information.

It is crucial to organise technical training of the staff on alternatives, but can budget used to buy chemical pesticides instead be used for the training?

The manager of Josaphat park raises the problem of the training of gardeners to alternative management. They have not used pesticides since 2004. They are not using leaf blowers any more, which were replaced with garden brooms.

The Brussels Region organised a public survey in 2013 and all the municipalities said that they needed financial support to organise trainings. But so far no subsidies are available. The region is establishing a hub on differentiated management, as provided for in the programme to reduce pesticides use.