

HERBICIDES ALONG THE TRACKS: Environmental groups demand action

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GASPÉ - The use of herbicides along the tracks is once again a hot topic as two environmental groups are demanding action from the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie.

Together for the Sustainable Future of Greater Gaspé questions the fact that the spraying plan has not been made public, which is a cause of concern for the population.

The group asked the Town of Gaspé to provide it with the herbicide spraying plan on its territory via the Access to Information Act.

"We are surprised by the response received. The town is not in possession of the spraying plan for 2022 and 2023. We consulted the Pesticides Management Code and, in the current text, we can read that the municipalities are supposed to receive this notice," explains the president of Together for the Sustainable Future of

Greater Gaspé, Lise Chartrand.

"Given that the spraying is done between April and September and the municipality should have received this notice, we are surprised," says Ms. Chartrand who intends to ask the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie how the spraying will be done and why municipalities like the Town of Gaspé did not receive any notice.

The environmental group questions the impacts on the health of people who are not informed of the spraying. "There are people who have told us that they are not aware of the spraying of herbicides. A mother told us that she was going to pick fruit there," says the president. "This is information that we are entitled to have," says Ms. Chartrand.

For its part, the Société de conservation Zico de la Baie de Gaspé is still asking for alternatives to be found instead of using herbicides along the tracks.

After submitting a 79-page brief, the organization managed to obtain a virtual meeting with the Ministry of Transport.

"We have gone through the file. We came back to the toxicity of the five herbicides used by the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie and the toxicity of creosote as well as the alternatives," mentions the president of SCZBC, Margret Grenier.

"We raised the fact that the ministry deals with the ecological management of the corridors of the road network to protect the environment. We asked for the same treatment for the railway. We asked the ministry and the railway company to do better and differently to put an end to the use of herbicides and creosote. This must be reconciled with the safety of the environment and the population," says Ms. Grenier.

"We mentioned that alternatives are common practice in North America, Europe and

elsewhere in the world," she says. The exploratory meeting made it possible to discuss the issues.

"We are waiting for news from the ministry's advisory committee," says Margret Grenier who is not optimistic about receiving a quick response.

The president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé, demonstrated a bit of impatience with having to justify the use of herbicides again this year.

"I think it's unfortunate that we're still receiving malicious comments regarding the application and treatment of herbicides on the railroad tracks," says Mr. Dubé.

Responding to Together for the Sustainable Future of Greater Gaspé, the president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie indicated that he was acting according to the regulations in place.

According to regulations, Mr. Dubé states that, "What is indicated (in the regulations) is

that the information must be sent to the ministry. Municipalities do not have to have it."

"I'll just remind people that there is Section 37 of the (Transportation) Act that says no person shall operate on the track, guideway or right-of-way other than on the crossings or signalized crossings. People have no business on the track. Section 82 says you could be fined between \$200 and \$500," says Mr. Dubé.

"It gets tiring. We respect environmental criteria. We use less and less (herbicides). We are part of society. I don't want people to think we're on another planet. We have a reality. It is a security issue. I don't think people would want to see a crash because the track wasn't maintained well," he states. He adds that he does not want to relive an accident like the one that occurred in March 2022 when an 83-year-old man who was walking on the railway tracks in Nouvelle was struck and killed.