

RAILWAY: Weed control

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GASPÉ – On July 10, the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) began the process of conducting its annual control measures for vegetation along the railway.

In a notice published on June 28 in a daily newspaper in Quebec, it was indicated that Entreprises Marc Leduc Inc. will carry out weed control on the ballast of the rail corridor in an effort to ensure the safety of the public and employees.

It is written in the notice that “if it is not eliminated, this vegetation can, in particular, fuel fires along the track and affect the quality of the inspections of the railway infrastructure.”

According to the notice published, the herbicide measures will run until August 31 on the entire sections of railway, from Matépédia to Gaspé. “All herbicide applications will be performed by certified applicators who will follow both federal and provincial regulations.”

The notice also mentions that operation will be carried out in accordance with Transport Canada's Railway Safety Act and the Act respecting guided land transport of the Quebec Transport Ministry. The notice stipulates that the tracks are private property to which public access and any activity including foraging is strictly prohibited at all times.

“We have obtained the 2023 schedule. There will be three herbicides including a compound of two herbicides and glyphosate in the formula as always. This is still toxic spraying and it is totally unacceptable. It jeopardizes our health and our environment. It has to stop,” says the president of the Société de conservation ZICO de la Baie-de-Gaspé, Margret Grenier.

Ms. Grenier elaborates by saying that herbicides can still be a danger to the population even outside of the railway's private property.

“That is not the question. Herbicides know no borders. You don't need to get close to be affected. Sometimes the leaching of herbicides through water can affect

health, as the products get into rivers and bays through natural flow,” says Ms. Grenier.

The conservation society has not heard back from the Quebec Ministry of Transport after a meeting this spring to discuss alternatives to protect the railway.

“We're going to contact them again. It was an exploratory meeting and we're still waiting to hear back,” explains the organization's president.

She hopes that the rehabilitation of section three will take into account herbicide alternatives. “This is a golden opportunity to do rehabilitation preventively. There are many ways that exclude (the use of) herbicides and enhance the quality of rehabilitation and contribute to the longevity of the track. There are only advantages to doing it this way,” says Ms. Grenier.

On the subject of herbicides, the president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé, says that it is always a question of safety. “It comes up every year and unfortunately, I will say the same answer. We do this according to the rules of the Ministry of the Environment. We are very controlled. Our spreading volumes are decreasing year after year. We are making efforts,” says Mr. Dubé.

“But unfortunately, there is a sad reality: there are no effective measures that are as economically profitable to achieve results as spreading herbicides on the railroad,” adds Mr. Dubé who says the only solution would have been to do the railway line in concrete to avoid future herbicide treatments.

“But it's not \$875 million that we should have invested, but possibly billions of dollars. The economic stakes are not worth it,” he says, mentioning that research is being done around the world to find alternatives.

“We, as a company, are monitoring this closely to ensure that we continue to reduce or improve our methods to use less and less (herbicides),” concludes Mr. Dubé.