

The Oregonian

Portland Bans Use of Bird Poison on City Property After Crow Deaths

*By Kale Williams
June 5, 2019*

Officials in Portland voted Wednesday to ban the use of Avitrol, a chemical marketed as a “bird control agent,” which has led to the deaths of dozens of crows on at least two occasions.

In a unanimous vote, commissioners banned use of Avitrol and other chemicals used to deter birds on all property owned and managed by the city.

“These poisons have absolutely no place anywhere in our community,” Commissioner Nick Fish said in a statement. “They not only put our birds and wildlife at risk, but they also put people and pets at risk as well.”

The move comes after two mass die-offs of crows over the last five years. In 2014, scores of dead or seizing birds were reported around the area of Southwest Third Avenue and Columbia. Responders found about 30 dead birds, mostly in downtown parks.

Last year, witnesses in Northeast Portland reported seeing nearly a dozen crows “falling from the sky,” seizing on the ground and dying. At least 10 of the corvids were found dead in the incident, but Bob Sallinger, conservation director of the Portland Audubon Society, said at the time there were likely more deaths than were recorded.

"We're picking up the ones that are easily visible from the street," he told The Oregonian/OregonLive in January 2018. "But we're only able to see a fraction of what's out there. Our concern is that this could be much bigger."

In both 2014 and 2018, testing revealed the birds had all died after ingesting Avitrol. In the earlier incident, responders also took in a gull that fell similarly ill.

Therein lies one of the major problems with Avitrol, critics say.

Described as a “chemical frightening agent” on the Avitrol website, the active ingredient in the product is 4-aminopyridine, which is applied to grain bait and impacts both the central and motor nervous systems, causing birds that ingest it to exhibit behaviors similar to an epileptic seizure. That erratic behavior, according to the company, will frighten the rest of the flock and force the birds to leave the area.

There have been no secondary poisonings from the use of Avitrol, according to the company, which cited a study in which dogs, rats and raptors were fed birds that had ingested the chemical and showed no ill effects. Documents from the Environmental Protection Agency, however, show that “that there is some risk to predators due to secondary effects from” the chemical. The agency noted that there had been four documented animal deaths, at least one of a bird that was endangered at the time, due to ingesting Avitrol.

But that’s an impossible claim to substantiate, Sallinger said, as birds that ingest Avitrol don’t always die immediately. If they die after they fly off, it’s likely they will be eaten by scavengers that may or may not become ill from the poison. If another animal were to die from secondary poisoning, Sallinger said, they would be hard to find and even harder to test for the chemical.

Portland has tried a number of novel approaches to mitigate the crow problem, which mostly boils down to the feculent mess they leave behind when they roost in downtown trees by the thousands in the winter months. They contracted out a Zamboni-like machine called the “Poopmaster 6000” to clean the sidewalks and they employed a falconry company to use Harris hawks to chase the crows to less populated areas.

Latest weapon in Portland's war on crow poop: more birds

Hawks are able to do what the Poopmaster 6000 could never accomplish.

Some have shown moderate degrees of success. All are better than poison, Sallinger said.

Sallinger conceded that Wednesday’s ban was mostly a symbolic one. The city doesn’t currently use Avitrol and, had the ban been in place earlier, it likely would not have prevented either of the previous die-offs. But the message sent by the ban is an important one, according to Sallinger.

“It helps put pressure on Avitrol,” he said. “We hope it spreads to other cities so we can move toward other solutions.”

Foster Road gets bike lanes as streetscape project nears completion

By Lizzy Acker

June 5, 2019

A major step in the transformation of Southeast Foster Road finally happened this week -- bike lanes were striped from Southeast 52nd Avenue to Lents.

The Foster Transportation and Streetscape Project has been in the works since 2014, when Portland’s City Council unanimously approved a \$5.25 million plan to make one of the city’s high-crash corridors safer by removing two of Foster Road’s lanes, taking the four-lane road down to two-lane, with a turn lane and bike lanes on either side.

Funding for what became a \$9 million project came from the Fixing our Streets Program, the Lents Town Center Urban Renewal District, Portland Transportation System Development Charges and Metro’s regional flexible funding program, the Portland Bureau of Transportation said Wednesday.

Work on the project began in the spring of 2018 and was expected to be completed by fall of that year.

While several months behind schedule, Hannah Schafer, a spokeswoman for the Portland Bureau of Transportation, said Wednesday that the project is nearly done.

“We still have some additional striping to finish up, and there are minor punch list items that the contractor still needs to complete,” Schafer said. “So we will be out there sporadically in different locations on the corridor for about two more months as we put the finishing touches on the street.”

According to the Bureau of Transportation, the streetscape project included complete road reconstruction and repaving from Southeast 82nd to 90th Avenues; new, upgraded traffic signals at Southeast Holgate and 72nd Avenue, and wider sidewalks between Southeast 83rd and 90th Avenue, as well as six new median refuge islands with rapid flash beacons.

The streetscape project has coincided with a business boom on Foster Road. The street now has a stretch of local pizza shops, and next week Shun Fat Marketplace will open in the location of a former Fred Meyer.

While plenty of people in the neighborhood are excited about the prospect of a bike lane down Foster Road, along with slower traffic and safer crossings, not everyone is enthusiastic. John Shleifer, owner of Euroclassic Furniture on Foster, has been blaring his protest of the project in huge signs and a reader board on his store's facade for years.

"The city has created a huge traffic mess," Shleifer said Wednesday.

Shleifer said he worries about the safety of bicyclists, pedestrians and drivers, calling the situation "frightening."

He's also complained about congestion and parking.

But on Wednesday afternoon, all but one of his signs had been taken down. Traffic on the now-two-lane Foster Road moved smoothly and cars parked inside the bike lanes.

Bikes didn't appear to be taking advantage of the lanes yet -- one biker was still using the sidewalk and there were cones in the bike lanes at several places -- but, as summer approaches, for the first time ever, commuters on bicycles now have a fast, direct route between Lents and 52nd Avenue.

How has new community approach in police settlement worked? Judge gets status report

*By Maxine Bernstein
June 6, 2019*

A judge has called city and federal attorneys back to court Thursday for a status report on how the city is doing in meeting requirements of a settlement signed in 2014 to address a U.S. Department of Justice investigation that found Portland police used excessive force against people with mental illness.

U.S. District Judge Michael H. Simon in April 2018 gave only conditional approval to a new community committee overseeing changes to police policy under the settlement. The first committee disbanded due to internal conflicts and lack of feedback from former police chiefs and the past mayor.

The city, the Justice Department and other interested parties have sent their own evaluations to the judge in court filings in recent weeks.

Here are some of their comments:

U.S. Department of Justice

The department said the city and police are following most of the settlement requirements but have yet to meet the community engagement standards through the new Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing.

Federal officials said the committee, active for eight months, has established a positive relationship with the mayor's office, the Police Bureau and "other relevant city actors" but still needs to create a "community engagement outreach plan" for police and independently assess the city's compliance with the required reforms.

The settlement called for significant changes to police policies, training and oversight, including offering more extensive crisis intervention training to officers.

Justice lawyers also wrote to the judge that police need to address accountability better and investigate complaints about officers faster.

Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform

The coalition said the new community group has held regular meetings and provided training to its members but has made little progress in involving residents at large.

Seven of the group's 13 members have resigned, mostly for personal reasons, and alternates have been appointed to replace them, but the high turnover has made it difficult for the group to get work done, the coalition said. The city also has yet to appoint a program director to support the group, according to the coalition.

The committee has made no comments on bureau policies since it formed, the coalition's lawyers wrote to the judge.

The coalition also cited concerns about the lack of impact from the settlement on police use of force involving people of color or people suffering from mental illness.

Of seven police shootings from Sept. 30, 2018, to Jan. 6, at least three people killed were suffering from a mental health crisis, the coalition said.

The committee "is not fully functioning, therefore the City cannot be in substantial compliance on community engagement," as the settlement requires, the coalition wrote.

The coalition urged the judge to allow more time for the city to demonstrate that the community group will be effective, its lawyers J. Ashlee Albies and Kristen A. Chambers wrote.

The Mental Health Alliance

Juan Chavez, an attorney representing the alliance, also urged the judge to give the city another six months to see if the new community group can make progress.

The alliance is made up of Disability Rights Oregon, the Mental Health Association of Portland and Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare.

"We are committed to building an equitable, safe and just environment for Portlanders with mental illness – especially during contacts with the Portland Police Bureau when they are vulnerable and historically at-risk for harm," Chavez wrote. "An effective and inclusive community-oversight body is crucial to this."

The alliance said it has noticed how representatives from the city and Justice Department have worked to push the committee "into a desired direction," leading to questions about the committee's independence.

The public's attendance at meetings have dropped since the committee's first meeting, the alliance said.

The alliance "cannot evaluate whether (the committee) has met any qualitative or quantitative metrics when it has not accomplished its first, central task of engaging the community."

The alliance said police use of force against people with mental illness hasn't dropped but increased; the police Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee meets behind closed doors and meeting times and dates aren't available to the public ahead of time; and the Unity Behavioral Health Center continues to be plagued by patient and staff injuries.

From media reports, court records and contacts with families, the alliance tallied 14 people who have died as the result of police force in Portland since 2014 and 14 others who were either wounded or shot at but not injured since then.

Twenty-six out of the 28 were impaired by mental illness or addiction or had a significant history of either, the alliance said. And seven were people of color.

Since a hearing in October before the judge, police have shot and killed seven people -- three who were in a mental health crisis at the time, the alliance said.

“Based on what we do know, it appears irrefutable that for a person with mental illness in the City of Portland coming into contact with its police force still carries too high of a risk of harm than should be tolerable either constitutionally or morally,” Chavez wrote.

City attorney

City attorney Tracey Reeve wants the judge to grant final approval to the city’s police-community engagement plan.

“The (community engagement committee) should not be asked to continue its near Herculean efforts with uncertainty hanging over its legal authority, duties and responsibilities,” Reeve wrote. “The dedicated community members who have stepped up to serve on the PCCEP and who are doing the difficult work of helping the City and PPB improve their engagement with the community and their provision of police services deserve validation by this Court.”

The committee has met each month since its first public session last Nov. 28, generally on the third Tuesday of the month, at a variety of locations, Reeve said. It has formed subcommittees on race, people with mental illness, youth issues and the settlement and police policies. It has adopted bylaws and elected officers.

The group hasn’t yet helped create the police community engagement plan, but is working toward that goal, Reeve said.

The group has offered input on an outside consultant’s survey of residents’ feelings about police and learned about current steps the bureau is taking to reach out to the community.

On the question raised by the Mental Health Alliance regarding the closed police Behavioral Health Unit advisory committee meetings, Reeve said the city believes that group “is not a governing body of a public body and is not legally mandated to comply with the open meetings provisions” in state law. It advises the Police Bureau through a lieutenant.

All sides are meeting at 9 a.m. Thursday in U.S. District Court in Portland.

The Portland Mercury

Oversight Questions Arise as Portland Pays to Clean Up Homeless Campsites

*By Thacher Schmid
June 6, 2019*

This past Valentine’s Day, Lillian Blackwolf was sleeping in her tent in a place locals call the Pillars, named for the concrete columns that hold up the Interstate 205 overpass above the Springwater Corridor. That’s when a Rapid Response Bio Clean truck—hired by the City of

Portland to clean up homeless camps—drove down the pedestrian path, hit the houseless woman’s tent, and sped off.

“I had alcohol burning, because that’s how we heat up our food sometimes, and I was lying there, and I fell out,” recalls Blackwolf. “The next thing you know, I was waking up to my hair wrapped up in the tent... and I get jerked to the middle of the tent. When I look outside my tent, I see the big dump truck.”

Blackwolf believes the truck’s tire ran over part of her head or her hair, dragging her across the tent. When she stood up, she felt “lightheaded and dizzy,” so she laid back down. Matthew Smith, a friend who witnessed the incident, says he stayed with her that evening. When she didn’t feel better the next morning, Blackwolf went to a local emergency room.

After being discharged the next day, Blackwolf returned to her damaged tent and says she was met by Smith; Rapid Response owner and president Lance Hamel; Tiffany Grigg, an outreach coordinator for Clackamas Service Center, a provider of services for the homeless; and the driver of the cleanup truck. After the driver apologized, Blackwolf says, Hamel paid for her to stay eight nights at the nearby Del Rancho Motel and gifted her a new tent and sleeping bag.

More than four months later, much about the incident remains unclear. Key players, including the City of Portland, Rapid Response, and Clackamas Service Center declined to discuss the event in detail with the Mercury. Advocates for the homeless say the event represents a pattern of bad behavior by Rapid Response, which has allegedly engaged in physical altercations, destroyed people’s belongings—including much-needed medication—and driven recklessly through homeless encampments. Blackwolf’s experience shows how, for many living outdoors, contracted trash cleanup crews have become the face of the city. And it’s not a very friendly one.

The incident and its aftermath raise questions about the practices of both Rapid Response, a key local contractor, and the city program that oversees campsite cleanups, the Homelessness/Urban Camping Impact Reduction Program (HUCIRP).

Here’s how Hamel described the incident in an email to the Mercury: “There was an incident where one of our trucks ran over the edge of a tent that was set up in close proximity to the I-205 multi-use path. After speaking with the individual, it was determined that they were not injured. We are now using a spotter walking alongside the truck when we are driving on the trail to ensure the safety of everyone utilizing the path. We want to make sure nothing like this ever happens again.”

Police were never called about the incident, Blackwolf and Smith say, and no incident report was written. According to Heather Hafer, spokesperson for the city’s Office of Management and Finance, which oversees HUCIRP, the city “does not have a standard policy” for such incidents.

“Any injury claims are the contractor’s responsibility to resolve, and this is included in the language of their contract,” Hafer wrote in an email to the Mercury. Asked about documents in case of an accident, she noted that “no such documents” exist.

Kristle Delihanty, who heads a street ministry nonprofit and works with Blackwolf as an unofficial advocate, takes a dim view of the situation. “It looks like it’s being swept up like a dirty affair,” she says. ““Sorry we ran you over, have a great life.””

Blackwolf thinks people just don’t care.

“I’m just a person on the trail,” she says. “They bought me this room and this tent and stuff, like, to shut me up. Like they know they’re wrong. Because the guy just said, ‘Oh, I’m sorry I ran you

over,' just peeking his head in the tent door. Is that how you would apologize to somebody you almost killed?"

In October 2015, the city declared a "state of emergency" regarding the city's housing and homelessness issues, expediting permits and softening zoning restrictions for shelters and affordable housing. Since then, voters have approved nearly \$1 billion for affordable housing in the Portland metro area. At the same time, campsite cleanups have ramped up in response to a huge increase in complaints received via One Point of Contact (OPC), the online system that enables Portlanders to report on homeless camps. Those overseeing OPC are also tasked with "cleanup coordination and responding to community complaints," according to their website.

A portion of the sites reported through OPC—about 12 percent in the last fiscal year—are assigned for cleanup, with HUCIRP coordinating efforts with three different firms to pick up the garbage and biohazards that amass at these sites. One, Central City Concern's Clean Start, handles around 1,000 sites a month, according to Hafer. A second contractor, Pacific Patrol Services, handles close-in areas through their sister company, Positive Action Cleaning, and provides warehouse storage for campers' personal property. Rapid Response, says Hafer, works "everywhere else."

In March, the city released an audit of HUCIRP that determined "demand for services has pushed the program past its capacity" and offered recommendations to improve its processes.

Complaints reported to OPC have hit an all-time high this year, with 876 reports reported in a single week. The reports received have grown from 139 in 2015 to 25,460 in 2018, Hafer says, with the number of campsite cleanups performed during that time growing from 139 to 3,122.

"What started as a temporary response to people living outside has evolved into a program spending more than \$3.6 million annually," notes the city audit.

On May 22, Portland City Council voted unanimously to authorize a competitive process to win HUCIRP contracts that, over five years, will pay out an estimated \$25 million.

Texts between Rapid Response owner Hamel and HUCIRP program manager Lucas Hillier, obtained via public records request, suggest coordination regarding the February incident with Blackwolf. "I just took that lady staying in the Del Rancho motel a new tent two new sleeping bags and two new chairs I guess her boyfriend Matt had to leave because they were getting a bunch of complaints about his dog," Hamel texted Hillier on February 21. (Smith and Blackwolf say they're just friends.)

A copy of a \$750 receipt for Room 26 of the Del Rancho Hotel, given to Blackwolf by a hotel manager and then shared with the Mercury, bears Hamel's signature and corroborates this information.

When Blackwolf went to Adventist Health's emergency room after the accident, she complained of head, neck, and back pain, along with ringing ears and muscle spasms. Discharge paperwork Blackwolf shared with the Mercury notes a "closed head injury," which can result when a traumatic blow causes the brain to knock against the skull.

"My neck still hurts and I'm still not able to walk right," Blackwolf said in February. "The back of my head hurts."

The paperwork also indicates drug abuse. Blackwolf admits to a history of addiction, and still drinks beer and smokes cannabis, but says she was sober on Valentine's Day. She adds that she's worked hard to overcome a checkered past and barriers to housing, with the help of work

training programs. She worked for a cab company for eight years, but often, she says, it's been one step forward, one step back.

The Pillars isn't a place anyone wants to stay at for very long.

The area has a history of tragedies. A notice posted at the Pillars in March reported a "brutal attack" in January. Rob Aquino, a houseless man who helps distribute food to local camps, says most homeless individuals know not to go there.

But, with many unhoused people getting around town by bicycle, the Pillars' location—at the intersection of the Springwater Corridor and the I-205 bike path—makes it convenient.

"It is the superhighway of information, of goods, of everything for the homeless population," says Lisa Lake, CEO of homeless advocacy nonprofit Advocacy 5. "So it's important. It's a place that a lot of people gather. Camps come and go through there."

Residents at the Pillars say the routine campsite cleanups hinder their ability to find stability and permanent housing—interrupting what officials call the "continuum" of care.

"I've tried to get off the streets," said Marylou, 55, as she cooked oatmeal at the Pillars in March. "But it's really hard when you're moving every three days. Shelters are full."

"My girlfriend's pregnant," said Katelynn Eccleston, another camper at the Pillars. "She's due like any moment now, and they came and took everything—no warning, no nothing."

Minutes later, a Rapid Response crew drove a white Isuzu truck down the path—with a man walking in front. Then they left.

During a May 22 Portland City Council discussion about HUCIRP cleanups, Mayor Ted Wheeler echoed a public comment that accused HUCIRP of harassing the homeless.

"How do you respond to that?" Wheeler asked HUCIRP's Hillier.

"We try to reduce the amount of harm or trauma that the people doing this work on behalf of the city are inflicting on people," Hillier responded. "I don't know that I'd feel good to say that we don't ever inflict any kind of trauma, because when somebody's living outside, and somebody comes and tells them, 'We're going to collect property,' that's a traumatic experience inherently."

As of March 18, Rapid Response, which employs around 25 people, had received a total of \$1.175 million since it began work for the city, says Hafer. While its 2016 contract was for up to \$100,000 over five years, Rapid Response is now authorized to receive up to \$1 million annually from the city. (Clean Start is granted \$505,000 a year, and Pacific Patrol Services is authorized \$523,118 a year.) A city contract pays Rapid Response employees \$89 an hour for "lead worker" positions and \$79 for "assistant worker."

The payday for Rapid Response doesn't end there. Vancouver, Washinton, recently contracted with the company for \$300,000 to clean homeless camps at similar rates. The company also has a \$50,000 contract with Metro and works in Washington and Clackamas counties. Metro's contract describes the work as "removal and disposal of bio-hazardous waste, hoarding, and gross filth."

In March, Rapid Response employees spoke briefly to the Mercury at the Pillars. (Hamel declined to confirm employees' names.)

"It pays the bills," said a man who gave his name as Stefan.

"It's honestly nice to clean up the city," said Khalil as he picked up a plastic bottle full of yellow liquid. "I was born and raised in Portland."

Unlike other contractors, Rapid Response's cleanups require campers relocate. The firm follows a city mandated procedure, which begins with posting an "Illegal Campsite" notice at the site the city instructs them to clean. Contractors then notify HUCIRP and homeless service providers. The notice states the cleanup will occur "no less than 48 hours after and within 10 days" of the date it's posted. Not knowing precisely when a contractor will come, many homeless people in the camps wait until the crews actually show up to move their belongings.

The tense relationship between campers and contractors has inspired many in the homeless community to call it "Rabid Response."

Blackwolf estimates she's been displaced by Rapid Response 40 times in the past two years. Delihanty, who runs the street ministry, says she observed "shitty behavior" when a Rapid Response cleanup crew member threw a houseless person's "life-saving medicine" into a truck—even though, she says, the container was marked with a "big red cross" and read "medicine inside."

"After I stomped my feet for 40 minutes, they finally got in the back of the truck," Delihanty says, "[but] they couldn't locate all the medicine... so we had to get this guy into an urgent care."

There are other documented incidents involving Rapid Response at the Pillars. According to a police report, a Rapid Response crew was cleaning up abandoned shopping carts on May 9 when an altercation occurred between James Barrett, a houseless man, and Quentin Gonzales, a Rapid Response employee. When Barrett asked about getting his property back, Gonzales allegedly directed Barrett to police, who were located 50 yards away.

But Barrett ignored Gonzales and climbed onto the back of the Rapid Response truck, prompting Gonzales to pull him out and pin him on the ground

"Gonzales said when he grabbed Barrett and pulled him off his truck, Barrett swung a plastic box and hit him in the neck/head area," wrote Portland Police Bureau officer Adi Ramic, who arrived on the scene shortly afterwards. "Gonzales said at that point he made decision to take Barrett to the ground and hold him." The report also claims that Barrett had a 12-inch knife on his belt and a "large dog."

Neither the city nor Rapid Response would answer the Mercury's questions about the incident.

Sabrina Urdes, the chair for the Lents Neighborhood Association (LNA), says that homelessness and the resultant trash that builds up from camps like the one at the Pillars remain big challenges.

"Ultimately, I think people are starting to get hopeless with the situation, with the trash," Urdes says. "We need larger solutions. It needs to come from the city. It's a bigger issue than what one or two neighbors can do by coming together."

Urdes declined to comment on HUCIRP or Rapid Response. But she recalled a recent cleanup effort with a private neighborhood "livability" nonprofit that turned divisive.

"Last spring, we tried to do a joint cleanup with the Lents Neighborhood Livability Association," says Urdes. "It was a dumpster cleanup. We tried to do it as a partnership. It ended up not working out."

David Potts, president of the Lents Neighborhood Livability Association (LNLA), says the LNLA paid for and headed the cleanup and some LNA board members pitched in.

LNLA, whose "Alley Angels" volunteer to clean up Lents' alleyways, hosts a blog that discusses reporting "feral humans" and "shitbirds" to the city. In May, LNLA's Facebook page included a Rapid Response job posting.

“We have nothing but praise” for Rapid Response, says Potts, who says he hasn’t observed the contractor’s interactions with houseless people.

Beverly Christman, a Lents resident whose backyard abuts the Pillars, says she has given milk to homeless mothers with babies who have knocked on her door. She once volunteered at Dignity Village, a tiny-house village for the homeless near Portland International Airport, and thinks the Pillars could benefit from a similar encampment.

“They need a place to go,” Christman says. “Put them in some place and let them get help.”

“If all we owe this woman is a hotel room, there’s some inequities here that we should look at.”
—State Representative Tawna Sanchez

That’s exactly what the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS), an office funded by the city and Multnomah County, has been trying to do. JOHS recently steered \$12 million towards single-room occupancy housing, as well as \$4 million toward supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals like Blackwolf and Smith.

Even as the federal government cuts billions of dollars that were once set aside for affordable housing, Mayor Wheeler’s proposed budget includes a record-high \$15 million for homeless services. And in the wake of the March audit of HUCIRP, the city unveiled a plan to increase the program’s staff, bulk up its website, and focus on best practices.

During the May City Council meeting, Hillier said HUCIRP has worked “really hard” to train contractors how to interact with houseless people. He said he wants future contracts to require the currently optional training.

During that same hearing, Commissioner Nick Fish mentioned the Anderson Agreement, a 2009 legal proceeding that set rules for how the city and its contractors handle homeless people’s possessions. Blackwolf’s experience—and the audit—suggest it’s being ignored.

The audit found “weak or non-existing” policies for safeguarding confiscated property. Several campers told auditors their property had been thrown away.

Blackwolf never got back her damaged tent, which was twice as big as the tent Hamel gave her.

Rep. Tawna Sanchez, who represents North Portland in the Oregon legislature, sees Blackwolf’s case as part of a larger issue.

“If the situation were different, if that were somebody with means or who had a place to live, there would be a lawsuit,” Sanchez says. “If all we owe this woman is a hotel room, there’s some inequities here that we should look at.”

OPB

Portland Bans Toxic Bird Poisons On City Property

By Cassandra Profita

June 5, 2019

The Portland City Council voted unanimously on Wednesday to ban the use of the toxic bird poisons known as avicides on city property.

The city already avoids using avicides, including the commercially available and lethal neurotoxin called Avitrol that was tied to two large-scale crow poisonings in downtown and northeast Portland in 2014 and 2018.

The unauthorized use of Avitrol led dozens of crows to fall from the sky, have seizures on the ground and die along city streets and sidewalks.

Now, city leaders want to send a message to federal regulators that license that chemical and others like it.

“This is unacceptable,” said Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish. “These poisonings are inhumane, and these types of actions risk exposing the general public, local wildlife and the entire food chain to a dangerous neurotoxin.”

The commission voted for a resolution that adopts an integrated pest management policy for the city that prohibits the use avicides, which are toxic to a lot of species — not just birds. The new policy supports non-lethal methods of managing bird-related problems such as hazing, exclusion and sidewalk cleaning.

Portland is joining New York City, San Francisco and Boulder, Colorado, on a growing list of cities that have banned avicides in the hopes of pressuring federal regulators to further restrict them.

“At the end of the day we have a very limited regulatory function as far as private actors,” Fish said. “So we’re hoping to set an example in how we use this in the public sphere and then use the bully pulpit to get others to follow us.”

City leaders also discussed sanitation issues surrounding the poop from thousands of crows that roost downtown in the winter, which they suspect is the reason someone used Avitrol to poison the birds.

The Downtown Clean and Safe janitorial program has employed various strategies to manage the problem, including a Zamboni-like machine they called the Poopmaster 6000 to wash away bird poop, and now falconers use hawks to scare the crows away from certain areas.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said there’s no reason to use toxic chemicals to kill the birds when there are other, non-toxic options to deal with their poop.

“We have employed humane approaches to addressing this problem,” he said. “I think we are being very naive — foolish even — if we think using neurotoxins on wildlife won’t eventually impact us as humans.”

Commissioner Chloe Eudaly said the city should consider similar action on other pesticides and herbicides such as Roundup and glyphosate.

Bob Sallinger, conservation director for the Portland Audubon Society, said he hopes the city’s resolution will pressure the Environmental Protection Agency to take Avitrol off the market by denying the next application for re-registration of the chemical.

“The problem is most of the regulatory authority is vested in the state and the feds, so in this case Portland is doing everything it can do and then sending a message as well,” he said.

His group collected a lot of the dead crows after the poisoning events in Portland to prevent the toxin from spreading to other wildlife, pets and people.

“These kinds of poisons are completely inappropriate for use in the city,” he said. “They’re indiscriminate, they are cruel and inhumane, they are dangerous and they don’t belong in our environment.”

Further Reading (Linked Below)

Winco shoppers surprised to see energy tax on receipts