

News release

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States Works' committed to reduce use of herbicides by 2021

States Works is trialling new alternative methods of weed control to help eliminate the use of herbicides, which could help minimise environmental impacts and protect the island's biodiversity.

The business has committed to phasing out, by the end of 2020, the use of glyphosate-based herbicides, which have been used to control unwanted vegetation for more than four decades. The chemical, which is contained in the popular weedkiller Round Up, is believed to have an effect on pollinating insects who come into contact with plants that have been treated.

David Correia, Manager of Land Management at States Works said: "A number of glyphosate alternatives are being trialled such as acetic acid, which is both organic and safer for the environment. The chemical, which is contained in vinegar, affects weeds on contact but does not penetrate into the plants root system. The effect on the plants will be very apparent within a 24hour period and may seem to indicate an initial dieback, but eventually the plant may revive again. The same applies to pelargonic acid, where again it does not seem to kill roots of pernicious tap-rooted plants.

"Trials are ongoing with the various different alternative methods and some have initially proved more effective than others but we are still very much trialling and monitoring the most suitable and effective method for specific locations.

"All of the alternative methods trialled so far have required more time than when using glyphosate, often because more treatments are required to achieve the same desired effect, however they are a lot better for the environment and more sustainable in the longer term."

States Works is also looking at manually removing weed using mechanical sweepers and brushes, as well as investigating the use of hot water and foam.

"The foam stream system uses starch to effectively insulate hot water, keeping the heat on the plant for a longer period causing it to die back," said Mr Correia.

“There are pros and cons for these more mechanical methods. Some can be noisy and others require the use of bulky application equipment that can limit their use and prevent access into smaller more difficult areas of the island.

“Ultimately there won’t be just one method that will provide the solution, but instead we will be developing a range of different interventions across different sites to come up with the best solution for our clients.”

Guernsey Water welcomes the use of alternatives to glyphosate. Margaret McGuinness, water quality risk manager said; “As long as these are used as directed for the specific product we can see no issues with their use as they do break down rapidly in the environment. We will be monitoring streams and other water sources to ensure there are no adverse effects.”

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