

Weed killers being used responsibly on train tracks, says CP spokesman

By **MARTIN C. BARRY**
The Chronicle

A spokesman for one of Canada's major railway companies says they are using chemical weed killers on railroad tracks responsibly and are not "poisoning the country," as a local environmental activist claims.

Michel Spénard, manager of public affairs in Montreal for the Canadian Pacific Railway, was reacting to statements made by Côte St. Luc residents Jack Cabot and Avrum Shtern in Côte St. Luc city council recently.

As reported in *The Chronicle* last week, Cabot said in reference to the railways' use of herbicides that they "are hiding behind the skirts of the federal government. They are poisoning the country. The whole country, not only Côte St. Luc."

Shtern, who lives next to the railroad line, urged Mayor Anthony Housefather to convince the railways to issue more effective warnings when they use herbicides on their tracks, "so people living along the railway can take precautions, close their windows or even not be in the backyard."

In defence of CP, which operates the rail yard in northern Côte St. Luc, Spénard pointed out that when the railway uses herbicides, it's strictly on the rock ballast that supports the tracks and other infrastructure.

"We're not spraying fence to fence," he said. "Our vegetation management plan is



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Weed killing chemicals in 2006 were used only within the Côte St. Luc railway yard, and then only sparingly, according to a CP official.

to let natural vegetation grow where possible ... This is safety-related and not beautification of the right-of-way."

Spénard said CP's main requirement in using herbicides is to keep the rail ballast clear of vegetation because roots and leaves can compromise safety. However, he added, the only herbicide spraying done in 2006 was inside the railway yard, but not on the rights-of-way. Spénard said CP uses a mixture of three herbicides: Karmex, Vantage and 2-4-D.

"Some are more effective against certain types of vegetation," he said, explaining the need for a mixture. Spénard maintained that CP informs the public whenever herbicide spraying is about to take place. "We publish an ad yearly in usually the main publication

in the area," he said, noting that prominent box ads are published in May in English and French-language Montreal daily newspapers.

Spénard said CP is using a weed-control system known as 'Weed Seeker,' consisting of a pickup truck equipped with steel wheels to run on the tracks, on which the front bumper is fitted with sensors. As the truck rolls along the track, the sensors detect vegetation while another mechanism sprays herbicide on weeds.

"We don't just sweep along and do the whole right-of-way," he said. "We're not spraying this year. We probably sprayed last year. Depending on inspections, we might not spray next year. Or we might because there might be an area that's infested. This is a way of keeping costs down. It's also a way of keeping environmental concerns down if there are some."

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"All the analysis has been done, but none of the consultation, so this is being rammed through," said resident Ian Hanchet. "Maybe we should get a second opinion. Maybe we should elect someone else."

But Tremblay said residents needn't be concerned. "This is oriented to making Addington Street better than it is now. The street will be less wide and they'll be more trees."

Nonetheless, residents regularly interrupted officials during the two-hour meeting, angry at what they felt was a secretive