

July 3/98

TIMES GLOBE, ST. JOHN'S N.B.

# CN determined to spray tracks despite meeting

**■ GOING AHEAD:**  
The Environment Minister insists the chemical is safe if used properly, but Valley mayors are still not entirely happy.

By **JOHN CHILIBECK**  
*Times Globe staff writer*

**SUSSEX** - CN is going ahead with its controversial herbicide spray program despite objections from Kennebecasis Valley mayors and many of their residents.

Company officials made the announcement Thursday after meeting with the mayors, the provincial Minister of Environment, and several other area politicians in a two-hour session in Sussex. The meeting was closed to the public.

The railway agreed to the talks after the mayors of Quispamsis and Hampton asked the minister, Gene Devereaux, to revoke CN's permit to spray herbicide along its

right-of-way between Moncton and Saint John this summer.

The mayors were angry that they were told about the program after the permit was issued by the Environment Department two months ago. They argued that the herbicide, known commercially as Garlon 4, could poison people who live near the tracks and be harmful to the environment.

Mr. Devereaux said after the meeting that he wouldn't revoke CN's permit because his department has already attached strict conditions on the company's use of the herbicide.

"My responsibility is to regulate application of a federally approved product," Mr. Devereaux said. "Our department feels that its use, under strict application rules, is reasonable."

A CN official agreed with this sentiment and said CN was guilty of poor communication, not poisoning the environment.

"The herbicide has been used before, and it's been used across Canada," said Pierre Leclerc, a CN public affairs manager.

**See RAIL, A12**

# Rail

*Continued from A1*

"We didn't have a problem like this before. That's why we were at the meeting this morning - if problems arise, we're here to correct them."

CN has said it wants to use the potent herbicide within five metres of its railway track because cutting the vegetation is too expensive. Herbicides like Garlon 4 can inhibit plant growth for a longer period of time.

Weeds on or near the track need to be removed because they block the vision of workers on the tracks and of people going through railway crossings. Dry vegetation on hot summer days also promotes trackside fires.

Mr. Leclerc said the company will now advise municipalities 24 to 48 hours before spraying. He also invited municipal officials and concerned residents to talk to the contractor, Midland Vegetation Management of Orangeville, Ont., about examining the spray equipment before workers do battle against the weeds.

CN said it will ask the contractor to post signs at railway crossings informing people about the herbicide spray program and providing a CN telephone number in Moncton where they can call for more information.

On top of that, the company promised to place more ads in newspapers and on radio and cable company TV channels to let people know when the spraying will take place.

CN must still abide by rules outlined in the permit. Spraying must be done in dry weather when winds are under 10 kilometres an hour, and a 15

metre set-back must be respected between the spray line and any homes. The company cannot spray near water courses, because the chemical is extremely toxic to fish, and it must use a drift control agent to ensure the herbicide doesn't spread onto pastureland, where cows and other lactating animals can be exposed to the harmful chemicals.

The company has already made an agreement with Quispamisis and Hampton not to spray through their communities, although workers will be allowed to brush the herbicide on vegetation in a particularly overgrown stretch near the Pettingill Road rail crossing.

The mayors seemed pleased with CN's willingness to talk, but were less happy with its decision to go ahead with spraying.

"This is not just an issue for Quispamisis; this is an issue of danger for the entire community," said the town's mayor, Leslie Hamilton-Brown. "We were hoping that CN would be the leader in this field and would stop spraying. But CN is just one company. There are other companies in the province besides CN who spray."

She said the Department of Environment should reconsider issuing permits for spraying herbicides and simply ban them outright.

"Maybe this was acceptable 10, 15 years ago," she said. "But now we know the problems associated with industrial chemicals and we should change our ways."

Sussex Mayor Ken Friars said CN couldn't be expected to put a moratorium in place this time around because the province had already issued

a permit, and the company had already hired a contractor for spraying.

He was satisfied with CN's attempts to inform the public, but hoped that the company and the province would agree to stop spraying in the future.

"Those people who have been afflicted by environmental sicknesses are especially sensitive. They don't want to see spray anywhere in the province if it can be avoided."

Patty Donovan, the mother of a 10-year-old child whom she says was poisoned by a floor buffer agent in his school in Quispamisis, also attended the meeting. If her son, Zechariah, is exposed to chemicals found in herbicides such as Garlon 4, his skin cracks and bleeds, his muscles ache, and he suffers from short-term memory loss.

She, too, was happy with the dialogue among industry, municipalities and the province, but was hoping they would agree to a different weed removal program.

"We should be employing people for cutting, not spraying - there's no shortage of people in New Brunswick who are willing to work," she said. "When you weigh the cost of dollars and cents to human life, there's no comparison between the two."

Mr. Devereaux said he was open to reviewing the way applications for spraying are done, but he added that New Brunswick already has one of the strictest codes in Canada.

CN has already begun its spray program between Moncton and Nova Scotia, and will work from Moncton to Saint John beginning July 9. The line between Moncton and Edmundston will be completed later this summer. ■