

REPORT

Parks and Recreation Department

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** March 28, 2022

From: Dean Gibson **File:** 2047922
Director of Parks and Recreation

Item #: 2022-215

Subject: European Chafer Management Program Update

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the European Chafer Management Subsidy Program be temporarily suspended, and

THAT staff be directed to monitor the impacts of the suspension for the next two years.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the City's European Chafer Management Subsidy Program and propose changes to the program for 2022.

SUMMARY

Subscription to the City's European Chafer Management Subsidy Program is declining at the same time as residents have increased access to effective alternate control products. Permissible non-pesticide defenses against the spread of the insect are increasingly available to home owners at retail outlets at a lower cost than the nematodes historically made available through the City's subsidy program.

The European Chafer, *Rhizotrogus majalis*, is a serious turf pest that first appeared in New Westminster lawns and boulevards in 2001. The European Chafer, in its grub stage, is very destructive to turf and lawns. The grubs feed on the roots of grasses during the summer and through to the spring. Considerable damage to turf can also occur in the fall and winter from animals, especially skunks and birds, digging up the grass to feed on the larger grubs.

In 2008 to assist New Westminster residents' efforts to combat the European Chafer and encourage safe and effective biological management approaches, City Council endorsed

a program to subsidize residents’ purchases of nematodes with access to watering permits to support the product application. Utilization of the subsidy program trended towards a decline in utilization between 2010 and 2014, and again between 2019 and 2021 as outlined in the chart below:

Nematode Subsidy Program Statistics

YEAR	COUPONS AVAILABLE	COUPONS REDEEMED	% REDEEMED VS AVAILABLE
2008	250	200	80%
2009	250	150	60%
2010	250	171	68%
2011	250	98	39%
2012	250	94	38%
2013	250	48	19%
2014	250	67	27%
2015	250	196	78%
2016	250	200	80%
2017	250	244	98%
2018	250	247	99%
2019	250	197	79%
2020	250	109	44%
2021	250	70	28%
Average	250	149	60%

POLICY / PAST PRACTICE

The City of New Westminster provided a 50% discount on the purchase of the biological control (nematodes) to a maximum purchase of two packages per New Westminster home owner, on a first-come, first-served basis.

In 2017, an agreement was developed with Garden Works Burnaby locations to inventory nematodes for New Westminster residents and oversee the administration of the subsidy program.

The Program has been promoted seasonally on an annual basis through the City Page in the local newspaper, the City’s website, and social medial channels.

DISCUSSION

Since 2019, a microbial product that can be used to manage European chafer beetle was approved and is now available in Canada and readily available at most garden centers. The active ingredient is *Bacillus thuringiensis galleriae* (also called Btg), which kills larvae or beetles after they have ingested it. The cost of Bacillus-containing products are lower than the cost of nematodes (for example, “Grub B Gon” \$.25/square meter compared to nematodes \$.45/square meter). The use of these newer products is permitted within the City’s Pesticide Bylaw.

The best non-pesticide defense against the European Chafer available to homeowners is to follow industry best practice measures to maintain a healthy lawn as resilient turf appears to better withstand the effects of this pest. Alternative ground covers that are resistant to the Chafer are also appropriate in some instances. Resources to help residents take preventive measures and manage the spread of the European Chafer remain available on the City’s website. The use of preventative, biological and cultural practices are all identified as best practices as referenced in [Metro Vancouver’s “Best Management Practices for European Chafer Beetle \(August 2021\)”](#)

Given the trending decline in subscription to the nematode subsidy program, and the increasing availability of effective, lower cost alternate products, it is recommended that the nematode subsidy program temporarily be suspended.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The Parks and Recreation Department annual operating budget includes \$10,000 in funding to subsidize local residents’ purchase of nematodes each year. Any “savings” resulting from the temporary suspension of the subsidy program would be directed towards the department’s activities related to supporting climate resiliency efforts within the City’s parks and open spaces.

CONCLUSION

The European Chafer is likely to remain an ongoing issue in the region, and implementing the City’s European Chafer Management Program as required will help control damage and minimize the spread of the insect.

Given the current downward trend in the subsidy utilization rate, fewer damaged lawns observed throughout the City, and readily available new products containing Bacillus which prove to be effective at a lower cost to homeowners, a suspension to the program is timely and can be reviewed annually as required.

Furthermore, the City of New Westminster does not use any grub control products on City owned and maintained properties. Supportive informational brochures on [healthy residential lawn care](#) remain available on the City [website](#) and at City facilities.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIASON

In 2007 the City's Engineering Department introduced a watering permit specific for the City's European Chafer Management Program. The permit allows the homeowner to water their lawns after applying the nematodes within the first three stages of the water restriction period. The Parks and Recreation Department continues to liaise with the Engineering Department to update them on the City's European Chafer Management Program.

OPTIONS

Options for Council's consideration include:

1. Temporarily suspend the European Chafer Management Subsidy Program
2. Monitor the impacts of the suspension for the next two years
3. Provide staff with alternate direction.

Options #1 and #2 are recommended.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment "A" – Smart Gardening & Lawn Care Brochure

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
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This report was reviewed by:
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This report was approved by:
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