

City Announces Immediate Freeze on Herbicide Use and Launches Remediation Plan Following Park Incident

WINTERS, TX — August 3, 2026 — The City of Winters announced today that an immediate city-wide freeze on all public works herbicide applications was implemented on July 10, 2026, following the discovery of a potential accidental misapplication of the chemicals Polaris (imazapyr) and Surmise Pro (glufosinate-ammonium) at the city park and other locations within the city. The city is taking full organizational responsibility for the operational failure and has launched an investigation to include a legal, regulatory, and environmental response.

Upon identifying the error, City Administrator, Kay O'Dell ordered an immediate halt to all chemical weed control by public works staff pending a full investigation. "We deeply regret this error and the impact it has on our community's treasured green spaces," said O'Dell. "We are committed to absolute transparency, immediate remediation, and changing our internal protocols to ensure this never happens again."

The city executed the following phased containment and remediation strategy:

- **Independent Expert Assessment:** The city acted upon an initial report from the Runnels County Agent and retained an external, Certified Arborist to independently document the damage and identify which trees can be saved. The city has also engaged a laboratory to test tree samples and is taking soil samples to validate the observations of the the arborist and to determine what action to take to remediate the soil.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** The city has proactively self-reported the incident to the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) Pesticide Enforcement Division, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and is working closely with legal counsel and the Texas Municipal League Risk Pool.
- **Phased Remediation:** The city has contracted for the immediate application of soil remediation protocols and growth regulator treatment for the remaining living trees and the removal of dead and severely damaged trees.

A formal, restoration plan will be presented at a future City Council meeting. The plan will detail options for restoration measures and outline mandatory new training protocols to verify that all future pesticide applications strictly adhere to state licensing laws and product labels.