

PESTICIDES: PLAYING FIELDS FOR CHILDREN



WHAT IS CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT PESTICIDE BAN?

In 2005, Connecticut became the first state in the nation to prohibit the use of lawn-care pesticides on the grounds of elementary schools. The pesticide ban was expanded in 2007 to include the grounds at schools through grade eight, and again in 2009 to include day care centers.

There are special exceptions to the law that allow for emergency applications of certain pesticides at schools under specific circumstances, such as for treating stinging insects, ticks or other situations that might endanger public health.

Sadly, despite research warning of significant health risks from exposure to pesticide chemicals for children of all ages, Connecticut's current law does not apply to high schools, state and municipal parks, playgrounds or playing fields.

WHAT IS THE DEBATE?

The industry surrounding the production and application of lawn-care pesticides includes chemical companies, lawn care businesses and facility grounds crews. The industry and groundskeepers argue that restricting the use of lawn-care pesticides would be a costly hardship and problematic for good maintenance, especially for high school playing fields which experience more wear-and-tear than elementary school fields.

The successful use of organic lawn care on some municipal, public playing fields, such as Branford and Cheshire, proves otherwise. Fields in those towns have not been treated with toxic pesticides for over five years and are in good playing condition, demonstrating that the use of toxic pesticides is unnecessary when the fields are properly cared for.

Studies have linked many commonly used lawn pesticides to health issues including cancer, asthma, birth defects, negative reproductive effects and abnormal brain development. Children are particularly susceptible to these dangers because of their rapid growth and reduced ability to detoxify toxins as they absorb chemicals through direct contact with skin, inhalation, or accidental ingestion. Research shows that even low levels of exposure to pesticides can have a long-term effect on a child's health.

Every year, the current ban is threatened. The pesticide chemical industry continues to push for rollbacks of Connecticut's current pesticides legislation by lobbying for legislation that will allow the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) or greater exceptions allowing for use of a

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wider variety of toxic pesticides in the event of undefined emergencies. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) allows for the use of synthetic chemical pesticides at the discretion of the licensed applicators. When IPM has been allowed in other states it has proven to be unenforceable, as it is impossible to monitor or restrict the amounts used and/or the frequency of any pesticide applications.

WHAT ABOUT THE COST?

A study in New York has shown that while the initial expense of implementing an organic turf management program is slightly more than continuing an existing IPM program, organic turf management is cheaper in the long run. The study estimates a net savings on expenditures realized in the first 5 years and annual savings of approximately 25% after that.

ARE SYNTHETIC TURF FIELDS A SAFE ALTERNATIVE?

With more playing fields being converted from grass to synthetic turf, there needs to be a new study concerning the impact of the materials used in these fields on public health. Many synthetic turf fields use crumb rubber as an infill. Crumb rubber is created from worn out tires that contain many toxic chemicals, particles of which are not meant to be inhaled and ingested by our children. These dangerous toxins can leech into our ground water or go into the air that our playing children breathe. Until the safety of synthetic fields is proven, they should not be seen as viable alternative to organically maintained grass fields.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Expand the pesticide ban

The legislature should expand the current pesticide ban to include high schools, public parks, greens and other spaces where children play. The bill should include an exception for certain nontoxic microbial and biochemical pesticides that can help control grubs. Expanding the ban will create a consistent policy for municipalities and better protect our children from being regularly and involuntarily exposed to the harmful effects of toxic pesticides.

In 2015, the General Assembly is considering legislation that would expand the pesticide ban to include high schools, municipal greens and municipal athletic fields. The proposed legislation does allow for certain microbial pesticides to be used to control grubs.

Ensure successful transitions to organic care

Municipal leaders have expressed a willingness to move to organic lawn care practices if the state can defray the initial costs of implementation. The legislature should appropriate \$800,000 in a special fund to help offset the initial costs for municipalities and ensure a successful transition to organic turf management. While the General Assembly is not considering specific legislation that would create this fund, defraying the costs faced by municipalities transitioning to organic lawn care practices should be part of the ongoing budget negotiations.

For more information
please contact:

Watershed Partnership

Dr. Jerry Silbert
Executive Director
203-453-8537
www.watershedpartnership.org

Citizens' Campaign for the Environment

Louis W. Burch, Connecticut
Program Coordinator
203-821-7050
lburch@citizenscampaign.org
www.citizenscampaign.org