

2003

Turfgrass Advocacy



New York State Turfgrass Association • February 4, 2003

BACKGROUND

The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) and Environmental Advocates of New York (EANY) recently released a report, "Avoidable Risk: Pesticide Use Patterns in New York State for 1999." Based on its findings, the report recommends enactment of legislation that would ban the aesthetic use of pesticides for lawn and grounds maintenance.

For example bills banning the aesthetic use of pesticides such as A.5565 (DiNapoli)/S.6561-a (LaValle) from the 01-02 session would cover:

- A. any pesticide that is classified as a known, *probable*, *likely* or *possible* human carcinogen by the EPA or classified as having *suggestive evidence* of being a carcinogen
- B. any pesticide classified as Category I or II for either oral, dermal or inhalation toxicity
- C. any pesticide for which the EPA has requested health and environmental studies for the purpose of registration or re-registration
- D. any pesticide which the DEC and Department of Health determine is a *likely* endocrine disrupter, immunotoxin or chronic neurotoxin
- E. any pesticide that has use restrictions imposed by EPA due to groundwater contamination, wildlife kills or threats to endangered species.

A current bill A.1871 (Thiele) would allow local regulation of pesticides for ground water protection. It sites that the use of pesticides for purely aesthetic, cosmetic, or ornamental purposes confers no public health or environmental benefit.

NYSTA Perspective

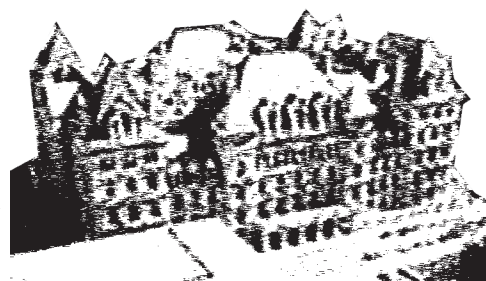
Sound science, not over simplified alarmism, should be the basis for environmental legislation and regulation. The supposed reason for the current pesticide reporting bill was to provide data that could be used to identify links between pesticide exposure and disease occurrences. In fact, an 8 million dollar study by the National Cancer Institute, led by Dr. Deborah Winn, showed conclusively that those women who got breast cancer were no more likely to be exposed to chemicals than those who didn't get breast cancer. In the study no credible links have been identified. Even those groups backing this legislation will concede that three years is not long enough to establish trends and that at least initially there were errors in reporting. Lastly, the studies cited in the report reveal that some pesticides can cause tumors in lab animals when fed excessively high doses throughout their lifetime. Many respected toxicologists agree that these doses are many times higher than any possible level of human or pet exposure.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a scientifically proven system of turf and landscape management that results in a marked reduction in the use of pesticides. IPM is successful because it acknowledges and accounts for an environmental system that is ever changing and complex in its dynamic make-up and relationships between its various components. More importantly, IPM education is helping to change the concept of an ideal landscape from the "perfect" image of the past to a more "environmentally healthy" image with a high level of quality that accepts some non-harmful threshold levels of pests and diseases. IPM is widely adopted by turf and landscape managers. IPM encourages the landscape manager to evaluate and diagnose problems. To manage problems the IPM approach is to first look to cultural practices (mowing, nutrition, soil management, water management, etc.), then the use of organic products (biostimulants, composts, beneficial nematodes, etc.) and finally the use of lawn and landscape protectants as a last resort.

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Due to the lack of proven and reliable alternatives for pest management, this legislation, although well intended, could do more harm than good. The use of carefully selected lawn and landscape protectants by professionally trained and continually educated certified applicators, at recommended label rates, is sometimes the only means to prevent major loss of lawn and landscape plants from pest pressures. This is even more critical in an urban setting where more plant stress and decreased pest migration sites can lead to catastrophic results. Without the availability of these tools, major loss and deterioration of local ecosystems is a disastrous possibility.

Lawn and landscape plants are not purely "aesthetic." In fact, their importance in the ecosystem is greatly increased in urban areas. Labeling them as solely aesthetic shows the depth of misconceptions and lack of proper respect for these areas of the environment. Lawns and landscapes: 1) convert carbon dioxide (CO₂) to Oxygen (O₂), 2) provide a cooling affect, 3) trap dust and dirt, 4) prevent erosion, 5) prevent runoff and provide groundwater recharge, 6) trap soil particles and pollutants for microbial decomposition, 7) provide safe play areas for family fun and sports. In addition to the environmental benefits, a good landscape provides other functions such as traffic management, and important security measures.

A lawn and landscape is part of what makes a house a home. Each has a unique and private quality that reflects the individual preference of its owner. Removing the accessibility of lawn and landscape protectants from these owners is an erosion of private property rights unprecedented in the USA. These products are tested and regulated by the federal and state governments. Every other state believes the public capable of making an informed decision on the use of lawn and landscape protectants. The people of New York State should be allowed the same freedom to make their own choice on the use of legally available regulated products.

Recommendations

- Oppose "aesthetic" bills such as those introduced last session by DiNapoli and LaValle and in this session by Thiele.
- Maintain and increase funding for Community IPM
- Provide more for research and extension education through dedicated funds for the New York Farm Viability Insititute.

NOTE

NYSTA has provided over \$500,000 during the last ten years to help fund research and education on environmentally-responsible turf management. (ie: *Influence of Microbial and Organic-based Products on Putting Green Performance* by Frank Rossi, Ph.D., Cornell University and *Plant, Pathogen, and Soil Factors Affecting Performance of Microbial Inoculants for Disease Control* by Eric B. Nelson, Ph.D. and Frank Rossi, Ph.D., Cornell University.)