Resources for a Pesticide-Free Community

Dear Supporter,

Thank you for pledging to work towards community pesticide reform. As the *Map of U.S. Pesticide Reform Policies* shows, there are many communities across the country that have already taken a stand against toxic pesticide use on lawns and landscapes. With the materials below, we hope to assist your efforts to enact local change.

The first step in a pesticide reform campaign is to research and become familiar with the harms associated with pesticide use, and alternatives that can replace them in an economical, and effective way. You'll need to be ready to speak to anyone from neighbors, to lawn care professionals, to elected leaders about the hazards and alternatives of toxic pesticides.

Hazards of Pesticide Use:

- Health Effects of 30 Commonly Used Lawn Care Pesticides
- Environmental Effects of 30 Commonly Used Lawn Care Pesticides
- Children and Pesticides Don't Mix
    - These documents lay out the facts of frequently used cosmetic lawn care pesticides in a simple to understand way. Use them as a leave-behind after meetings.
- American Academy of Pediatrics Report on Pesticide Exposure in Children
    - Quote: “Children encounter pesticides daily and have unique susceptibilities to their potential toxicity. Acute poisoning risks are clear, and understanding of chronic health implications from both acute and chronic exposure are emerging. Epidemiologic evidence demonstrates associations between early life exposure to pesticides and pediatric cancers, decreased cognitive function, and behavioral problems
- World Health Organization Determination of Glyphosate as a Probable Human Carcinogen
    - Also see Beyond Pesticides' fact sheet on glyphosate

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Pesticides and Their Impact on Children, Key Facts and Talking Points
    - Quote: "Due to key differences in physiology and behavior, children are more susceptible to environmental hazards than adults."
    - Quote: "Children’s hand-to-mouth contact is more frequent, exposing them to toxins through ingestion.”

    - Quote: "The American Association of Poison Control Centers data reports more than 70,000 calls made to poison centers with concerns about potential exposure to common household pesticides."
- Beyond Pesticides' Pesticide Induced Diseases Database
    - Provides links to peer-reviewed scientific studies linking pesticides to diseases that are all too common in today's world.

Framing the approach:

As a local advocate, you're making the case that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is not doing enough to protect communities from toxic pesticide exposure. Given insufficient action at the federal level, this leaves states and localities to pick up the slack in protecting their residents. Here are the specifics on why EPA isn't doing enough to properly vet toxic chemicals:

1. EPA only tests the active ingredient in pesticide formulations. Despite the fact that a pesticide product can contain multiple ingredients, the agency does not look at what are known as "synergistic impacts." Science shows that combinations of active ingredients can increase or decrease the toxicity of a product, but this impact is simply not evaluated by the agency.

2. EPA does not test the toxicity of "inert ingredients" or combinations of inert ingredients and active ingredients, despite the fact that they may comprise up to 99.9% of a pesticide formulation. Beyond Pesticides' and allies have sued the agency to require disclosure, but legal maneuvering has kept consumers in the dark.

3. EPA often registers pesticides through a program called "conditional registration." In these cases, the agency permits a pesticide to go to market without all of its required data on health and environmental impacts because the agency assumes that no harm will come as it waits for this data. Time and time again, EPA has been criticized for this practice, including in a report from the Government Accountability Office. The agency wrote: “Specifically, EPA does not have a reliable system, such as an automated data system, to track key information related to conditional registrations, including whether companies have submitted additional data within required time frames.” Past incidents like the herbicide Imprellis, or insecticide flubendiamide show the danger this program can cause.

Promoting Alternatives:

Some local leaders will delve deeper into the science, and understand the need for action based on the hazards pesticide pose to human and environmental health. However, others will remain skeptical, concerned that they will be losing an important tool for the community to control pests and weeds. That is why it is critically important to be prepared not only to identify the problem, but also provide a positive solution. The good thing is that every day, the rapidly growing organic sector is providing new and innovative practices and products that can replace toxic pesticides.

- Organic Lawn Care 101
    - A simple, straightforward introduction to organic lawn care that lays out the basics steps.
- Read Your Weeds: A Simple Guide to Creating a Healthy Lawn
    - Learn about the conditions that promote weeds and how you can correct them.
- Least Toxic Control of Weeds
    - Provides alternative products and practices to chemical-intensive lawn care.
- In depth documents for organic lawn care
    - Establishing sustainable lawns
    - Maintaining sustainable lawns

Framing the approach:

Even if your local leaders aren't convinced pesticides are harmful, the question becomes one of precaution. Even if there is small chance of harm, why would we as a community take the risk, given that there are readily available economic and effective alternatives? Here are the key points to make for organic land care:

1. Organic alternatives are cost effective. Take it from Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection: "If your lawn is currently chemically dependent, initially it may be more expensive to restore it. But in the long term, an organic lawn will actually cost you less money. Once established, an organic lawn uses less water and fertilizers, and requires less labor for mowing and maintenance." There's also research from Harvard University, which has a long-standing organic land care program. It's investigation determined that, ultimately, total operating costs of the organic maintenance program are expected to be the same as its prior the conventionally based program. In a 2009 New York Times article, the school determined that irrigation was reduced by 30%, saving 2 million gallons of water a year as a result of reduced irrigation needs. The school was also spending $35,000/year trucking yard waste off site. The university can now use those materials for composting and has saved an additional $10k/year due to the decreased cost and need to purchase fertilizer from off-campus sources. As another source, see nationally renowned lawn care expert Chip Osborne's report, which looks specifically at the cost of conventional and organic turf management on school athletic fields. The report concludes that once established, a natural turf management program can result in savings of greater than 25% compared to a conventional turf management program. There have been leaps and strides in the efficiency of organic systems since that report was first published.

2. You can maintain an aesthetically appealing lawn without the use of toxic pesticides. By focusing on natural systems, turf and landscapes build what's known as ecological resiliency. Resiliency is a term used to describe the ability for an environment to bounce back to its previous state after a disturbance. Organic land management requires a "systems approach," which incorporates preventive steps based on building soil biomass to improve soil fertility and turf grass health, organic products based on a soil analysis that determines need, and specific cultural practices, including mowing height, aeration, dethatching, and over-seeding. Organic turf management is a “feed-the-soil” approach

that centers on natural, organic fertilization, microbial inoculants, compost teas, and compost topdressing as needed. This approach builds a soil environment rich in microbiology that will produce strong, healthy turf able to withstand stress. When properly maintained, organic lawns look just as appealing as a conventional, chemical based approach.

Organizing to Win

Standing up at a public meeting isn't an easy task, but when you have the support of a group of like-minded residents behind you, your confidence grows, and so will the power of your voice. Use the following resources as a guide to begin building your pesticide-free movement:

- Start Your Own Local Movement
  - Key points to focus on and steps you can take to organize in your community.
- Getting the Message Across
  - Provides helpful tips on how to talk to your neighbors about pesticides.
- Change.org / Moveon.org
  - Elevate your movement and show broad community support for your efforts through a petition. When writing your petition, explain your request clearly, and make sure you're directing it to the right decision maker in your community. Most often, your Mayor or City Council will be the focus of your efforts.

Framing the Approach

Advocates should approach this issue in good faith, with an assumption that all stakeholders on issues surrounding pesticide use want to be responsible and protective of human health and the environment. Local officials, pesticide operators, and conventional landscapers are not bad people, they like all folks in the country, are working hard to provide for their families and protect their community. Our focus is on education, not castigation. When discussing the negative impacts of pesticides, put your efforts into telling the story of folks in the community that have been injured by pesticide use. After all, there wouldn't be support for pesticide reduction policies if there weren't people on the front lines experiencing the negative effects of the current system. Emphasize the positive impacts of pesticide reform: improved public health, cleaner air and water, healthier ecosystems for pollinators and other wildlife, and cost-savings.

Once you've joined together with a core group of advocates, give yourselves a name, and begin outreach to other stakeholders, including environmental organizations, organic landscapers, community groups, garden clubs, churches, and your local PTA. Get in contact with your local leaders, including your Mayor or City/Town Council, and begin to develop a relationship and introduce the issue to their office. Your efforts will be guided by their response. Work towards a hearing on pesticide use in your community. If you can't get one right away, apply external pressure by, for instance, tabling at community events, starting a petition, and/or sending letters to the editor of local papers. Once you get a hearing, pack the room with advocates to as a show of support for pesticide reform. See the section below when you get word officials are willing to put forward new legislation.

Passing a Policy

Once you've got the ear of your local legislators, and they're ready to act, you'll need to have examples of other communities that have passed similar polices. You can use the Map of U.S. Pesticide Reform and the over 115 communities it displays as a guide. But you'll also need to make sure you'll be able to pass the type of law you'd like. Unfortunately, 43 states are prohibited (preempted) from enacting any pesticide law that is stricter than the state's. In these states, any law your elected officials pass won't be able to address pesticide use on private property. Beyond Pesticides and Organic Consumers Association are working hard to roll back state preemption, and we'll need strong community organizations and local laws to help make the case. Read more about state preemption in this article.

Once you know your state's preemption status, start with Beyond Pesticides Model Policy for Public Property and our Model Policy for Public and Private Property. The *Map of U.S. Pesticide Reform Policies* can also help guide the type of policy that will work in your community. Keep an eye out for policies that follow "organic methods" as a model to present to councilmembers. If you can't get legislation introduced, craft your own and propose it to your elected officials.

Here is a very general overview of the components of a pesticide ordinance:

- Frame the policy through a robust "Whereas" or "Purpose" statements detailing the health hazards of pesticides and the viability of alternatives
    - See Takoma Park, MD's ordinance as a guide.
- Strictly define the “natural/organic pest management approach” and require it be followed on all publicly-owned lands
    - See Camden, ME's policy as a guide.
- Create a list of "allowed pesticides" that applies to both public property (and residential use if not in a preemption state).
    - See South Portland's pesticide ordinance as a guide.
- Include a public education and outreach campaign
    - See Montgomery County, MD's ordinance as a guide.

Other considerations include:

- Phase in period – how long will public land managers (and residents, if applicable) need to transition green spaces from conventional to natural/organic?
    - These may range from 0-5 years, generally depending on the political climate.
- A pest management committee/sustainability coordinator. It can be helpful to have someone or a group of citizens overseeing the implementation of the ordinance.
    - See Rockport, ME's pesticide policy as a guide
- What exemptions are acceptable to the community? While public health and state-mandated applications generally can’t be ignored, what about exemptions for gardens, trees and shrubs, golf courses, agricultural land, homeowner associations, etc.?
    - See Hyattsville, MD's ordinance as a guide for exemptions.

- Should the community require regular training on organic practices for employees?
    - See Scarborough, ME's pesticide policy as a guide.
- Enforcement – how should penalties be assessed? For public ordinances, generally no enforcement mechanism is necessary, for private ordinances, a low class misdemeanor has been used.
    - See Ogunquit, ME's ordinance as a guide.

If you've reached the point where you're drafting an ordinance, we hope that you've already been in contact with us about your efforts. Don't hesitate to reach out to Beyond Pesticides or Organic Consumers Association for strategic assistance as you move forward. Thank you again for your efforts to enact community pesticide reform!