National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns
Supporting healthy lawns and landscapes without the use of pesticides
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Grassroots Action Supplement: Organic Land Care Policies and Pesticide-Free Zones Growing: Inspiring Stories from across the Country

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In this special supplement to our December Grassroots Action alert we feature just some of the inpiring stories from around the country of activists promoting important change for safer communities. Many of these efforts are the result of one concerned citizen or the efforts of organizations on our National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns Steering Committee. The list of states involved, and the number of policies described only begin to convey the enormous movement for pesticide-free landscapes we see going on.

California – Model City Ordinances and Growing Pesticide-Free Zones

From established integrated pest management (IPM) policies in **San Francisco** and **San Diego** to an emerging number of pesticide-free parks in Marin County, California is seeing a steady and increasing interest in managing its cities and town lands without pesticides. Through its established IPM program, San Francisco resolved 80% of its indoor pest problems without pesticides and cut over half of its pesticide use on parks and playgrounds.

Marin County's Beyond Pesticides, a National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns (NCPFL) steering member, just started a pesticide-free zone campaign and has already transformed three parks in Mill Valley, all parks in Corte Madera, all parks in Fairfax, the private Pixie Park for pre schoolers- as well as the entire Marin Art and Garden Center to pesticide-free zones shown here.

Arcata, Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz also count themselves among the towns passing or policies restricting pesticide use.

Marin County Art and Garden Center

Connecticut - Major Progress on Organic Playing Fields and Parks

The Watershed Partnership, also a steering member of the NCPFL, is working to show that organic land care is a safe, effective, affordable alternative for attractive lawns and turf. In addition to educating the public, this group has been working hard to demonstrate and publicize the effectiveness of organic lawn and turf care. "We chose to focus on lawns and turf on school grounds, first to protect children who are the most vulnerable, and second because these are places where many people can see the results of good organic care," said Jerry Silbert, executive director.

The Partnership's work with the **Town of Cheshire** to pilot organic care of three athletic fields just finished its second season and is showing excellent results. An independent evaluation of the high school field showed the soil improving and the turf getting stronger and thicker. Because compost is an essential ingredient in organic care, the Partnership is working closely with Cheshire to develop an inexpensive source of high quality compost from leaves collected in the fall.

The **Town of Granby** has been maintaining their athletic fields organically for several years, and along with Cheshire, is featured in a new seven-minute DVD promoting municipal organic land care by Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection.

And now, in a bold move, the **Town of Essex** has committed to organic land care for all municipal properties, including schools. The Partnership is working closely with Essex officials to see that they succeed in their commitment.

In February 2006, the **Plainville** Town Council voted unanimously to maintain its Paderewski Park (37 acres) without harmful pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Marking a first in town history, an organic turf program will be implemented on the park's ball fields.

Community awareness began to grow in Plainville when Conservation Commission member Jason Rupaka spearheaded the Freedom Lawn Initiative in July of 2005 asking the Town Council to adopt a resolution supporting a citizens' voluntary phase-out of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. Since, 50 homeowners have joined the Freedom Lawn Initiative, committing over 53 acres as pesticide-free zones. Additionally, the Pesticide Free River Project is underway to educate river-front property owners about runoff and the risks and hazards of pesticide applications. Six town parcels abut one of these rivers, and if the town council approves, these 130 acres would be added to the Freedom Lawn Initiative.

Connecticut activists are also working to expand 2005's groundbreaking ban on lawn chemicals for elementary schools and pre-school facilities to middle and high schools this coming year**.**

Kansas – Pesticide-Free Catching On

In 2003, **Wichita**, went pesticide-free in 10 of the city's 105 parks. It was following the lead of **Lawrence,** led by local activists Marie Stockett, three parks, totaling 12 acres, were designated as pesticide-free the previous spring.

Massachusetts – Town Land Care Policies Growing

The **City of Newton** developed the first IPM Policy in Massachusetts which started with a concerned citizen. In the Spring of 1994 public health advocate Ellie Goldberg's daughter became extremely short of breath and two students vomited after a field run. The teacher assured her no chemicals had been used, but Ellie's call to the Parks Department revealed a city contract to regularly blanket spray school fields and public parks with a mix of toxic herbicides. Neither school staff nor parents were informed or warning signs posted.

Ellie joined with like-minded residents to form the Committee for Alternatives to Pesticides of the Green Decade Coalition (GreenCAP) to educate themselves and the public about the hazards of pesticides and alternatives. GreenCAP created a resource library, held public forums, and asked citizens to pledge to learn about alternatives. Soon round green and white lawn markers signaling pledgers blanketed the community.

GreenCAP partnered with municipal departments in writing the Newton IPM Policy (adopted by Mayor's executive order), which became a model and inspiration for many other communities.

Similarly, a group of concerned north shore citizens formed the **Marblehead** Pesticide Awareness Committee (MPAC) to educate their community about organic land care by showing them that it works. Several years of public education and landscaper training classes left the community still wanting proof that a "no chemical" approach was viable. So, MPAC Co-Chairs Pat Beckett and Chip Osborne built the Living Lawn – a seeing-is-believing demonstration site.

With their proof and a growing movement in their community, they were asked by their Board of Health to co-write the first municipal Organic Land Care Policy, which also impacts decisions related to

aquatic weed and mosquito control. Currently, the town land and 15 acres of athletic fields are under organic care, demonstrating that it can be done!

The **Town of Wellesley** soon adopted a similar policy, led by activist, mother and Ph.D. Sarah Little working began working as a part-time pesticide coordinator for the town. Sarah took a regional approach by training surrounding municipalities. Sarah developed a guide for citizens and municipalities interested in reducing the impacts of pesticides in their community and formed the Massachusetts Pesticide Awareness Collaborative. Many towns are now pursuing municipal-based land care policies, usually led by a determined activist or enlightened official.

Minnesota- Pilot Testing Organic Turfgrass

In **Mankato**, parents and district staff have expressed concerns about the use of herbicides on school grounds, especially because the chemicals are tracked indoors and persist where children spend most of their time. Deciding to pilot test an organic approach, the Mankato Schools received a $40,000 grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to examine two corn by-products for their fertilizer and weed control effectiveness. Corn gluten meal (CGM) is a by-product of corn processing, and dried distiller's grain (DDG) is a by-product of ethanol production.

The study compares organic products, a control, and a standard commercial fertilizer against current chemical-treatment practices. The testing grounds are athletic fields and playgrounds that receive heavy use by students all year. During the next 18 months, the Mankato Schools will evaluate the cost effectiveness of using these alternatives on a larger scale to supplement and/or replace the current use of conventional, synthetically-produced turfgrass fertilizers and herbicides. They will report and distribute their findings to other school districts, and interested parties. We look forward to seeing the results.

Northwest States – Pesticide-Free Zones Going Strong

Washington and **Oregon** are a hotbed for pesticide-free zones. The Washington Toxics Coalition (steering member of NCPFL) has a number of initiatives promoting pesticide-free zones including the distribution of over 4000 pesticide-free zone (PFZ) signs to residents and institutions committed to organic or pesticide-free lawn care. They have a PFZ Sign Owners Manual and several Pesticide Free Zone Slide Shows of notable landscapes and yards that prominently and proudly display the signs.

In another effort, the **Seattle** Public Utilities sponsors the Green Gardening Program, providing training and resources for King County professional landscapers on alternatives to lawn and garden chemicals. See http://www.watoxics.org/homes-and-gardens/lawn-and-garden.

The Port of Seattle, Washington is "maintained oganically"

Since 2001, the Seattle Park and Recreation Department has designated 22 parks as pesticide-free, as well as the Port of Seattle (shown here), 12 Public Libraries, and 53 community P-Patch gardens. Other institutional landscapes that are pesticide-free or organic include **Seattle University, Evergreen State College** and **Bastyr University**. **Bainbridge Island and Lynnwood** are also listed as pesticide-free partners.

In **Portland, Oregon** three parks have been designated pesticide-free and Salem now has 45!

The **City of Eugene**, joined cities across the

northwest in launching a pesticide-free parks pilot program this past June and chose five parks to be maintained pesticide-free during a one-year pilot program. They will be trying alternate methods such as flame weeding, hand weeding, and mulching to control weeds.

A report by the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP), *Pesticide-free Parks: It's Time!*, shows the many reasons why pesticide-free parks benefit communities. The report, summarizes the hazards of pesticides and offers simple advice for communities. See http://www.pesticide.org/pfpreport.pdf

Rhode Island – Safe Playing Fields Long Established

In **Hope Valley,** the Chariho Youth Soccer Association's playing fields have been quietly cared for organically since the early 1990s, and the landscape contractor, Merner Landscaping, says they look great all year round! Demonstrating the importance of a knowledgeable contractor, this company's personnel are educated in sustainable and organic practices,100% of the business inventory is organic, and they specialize in sustainable landscapes.

The Toxics Information Project, a steering member of NCPFL, has a "Less Toxic Landscaping Campaign" led by Liberty Goodwin. They have a Less Toxic Landscaping Resource Directory for RI citizens, public discussions, and training on organic athletic field care. They are also working on re-submitting a bill from last year – one banning lawn pesticide use on school grounds. See http://www.toxicsinfo.org/.

We hope you are inspired by what you just read and will take action to promote organic land care policies and pesticide-free zones in your community. To join us in our Policy Work Groups and Organic Land Care Basic Training for Municipal Officials and Transitioning Landscapers, see **www.pesticidefreelawns.org/actions**.

For more information on the policies and resolutions discussed here, and for a list of more pesticide-free initiatives, see our Tools for Change **http://www.beyondpesticides.org/lawn/activist/index.htm**.