National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns
Supporting healthy lawns and landscapes without the use of pesticides
701 E Street SE #200, Washington, DC 20003 - 202-543-5450 - shoover@beyondpesticides.org

GRASSROOTS NEWS

Sept/Oct 2005

Dear Coalition member,

Welcome to those who have just joined the National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns. If you are receiving this bi-monthly newsletter, then you are one of over 450 others (and growing) who openly believe that toxic lawn chemicals are unnecessary and not worth the risks they pose.

Good News...
HOME DEPOT GOT THE MESSAGE, 5000 TIMES! Together, we met our goal to deliver 5000 take-in letters to local Home Depot stores nationwide, with more being taken in everyday. Thank you to everyone who is participating and passing the message on to friends and family. We plan to keep it up at least through the Fall season. Now comes the test – will Home Depot come to the table? We think they will. And if they don't… we have something else up our sleeve.

Many of you had great ideas and we appreciate hearing from you. Some have asked why the Coalition chose to do a take-in letter to local stores instead of targeting the headquarters in Atlanta. By all means, please send a letter or email to headquarters! (See www.pesticidefreelawns/action/take-in for a link to PANNA's quick and easy email alert or "Questions and Answers" for the address.)

Home Depot goes to particular lengths to shield store managers from campaigns such as ours. By bringing the issue to the store manager, the stir starts at the bottom and works its way up to the top so that it is actually the manager who delivers our message to headquarters for us.

Across the country, people like you are making a difference. Some are meeting with city council officials, some are educating grounds managers, and others are talking with neighbors spreading the word that lawns don't need poisons to be green.

The truth is, one person CAN make a difference. Just the other day, Robert Resnik of Bethesda, MD convinced a neighboring hospital to cancel their contact with TruGreen ChemLawn and go pesticide-free. It's not easy to talk to people about pesticides and environmental toxins, but it can be greatly rewarding in the end.

To get involved in planning the corporate campaign, share what you or your local group are up to, get in touch with Coalition friends in your area, tell us you delivered your letter, or receive any other information, contact Beyond Pesticides at (202) 543-5450 or shoover@beyondpesticides.org.

ACTION OF THE MONTH:
Letter to the Editor

When most people, including reporters, think about lawn care they associate it with Spring. In reality, it is the Fall season that is most critical. By using a good organic fertilizer, overseeding, raking up leaves, and continuing to mow and water properly, the lawn will be greener, healthier, and more weed-resistant in the Spring. It's an easy concept – healthy soil in fall means fewer poisons in Spring.

It is up to each of us to create a shift in our local media to stop the cycle of pesticides. We have the power to reframe the image of lawn care in this country – to disassociate green lawns with pesticides and instill the notion that pesticide-free lawns can be just as green and thick as a toxic lawn.

To make that shift, we must encourage our local news outlets of the importance of Fall lawn care. If anything, the horrors of Hurricane Katrina provided stark illustration of our immediate need to reduce the toxins in our communities.

This month, send or, as they typically prefer email a letter to the editor of your local paper. Across the country, let's make a giant push to get local papers to recognize the importance of sowing the seeds of a healthy lawn now, literally. **Two sample letters are attached**. You can also add information about your area such as problems with run off, children playing on freshly treated lawns, etc.

Personalizing your letter with your own thoughts and experience will give it a depth the editor will likely want to print. Keep in mind that letters should be no more than 200 to 250 words. For media tips visit: www.beyondpesticides.org/how-to/media.

TIPS FROM THE FIELD: Fall Lawn Care

The key to a healthy weed-resistant lawn is a diversity of beneficial organisms in the soil. It is this "living soil" that will allow your lawn to absorb water and nutrients while resisting insects, diseases and weed invasion.

1. **Mow and water** – These good practices, and raking leaves, continue until the first frost though less frequently. In Fall, energy produced by photosynthesis gets redirected for root growth and storage, which means you can mow the grass a little shorter, about 2".

2. **Aerate soil** - Heavy activity can compact the soil. Removal of soil cores allows fertilizer, moisture and conditioners to enter the soil depths and feed the roots.

3. **Dethatch if necessary** - Thatch is a layer of plant debris on the surface of the soil. If more than ½" to ¾" thick, problems will arise. Shifting to organic lawn care will usually eliminate thatch.

4. **Test the soil** - Soil test kits, available at local nurseries, tell you the nitrogen, phosphorus and potash content (the three numbers on bags of fertilizer) as well as the soil pH (acidity/alkalinity). Utilizing a soil testing service will provide more insights into what you do with the information. Look for one that offers organic advice. [Editor's note: BUGS offers this service with excellence.]

5. **Fertilize** - Apply an organic plant or animal based fertilizer (never use Milorganite, which contains sewage sludge). Some new organic fertilizers contain beneficial soil organisms such as mycorrhizal fungi. Brands include: Whitney Farms Life Link, EB Stone Organics, Roots, Plant Health Care, and Dr. Earth, among others.

6. **Seed and overseed** – Fill in bare and thin spots (or the entire surface) using quality locally-adapted grass seed. Cooperative extension (www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension) can recommend locally adapted turf seeds,

7. **Topdress** – Add a light layer of fine textured compost, compost tea or earthworm castings. This will keep the seed moist, improve germination, and provide food for soil organisms. The organisms will in turn reduce thatch, feed your turf and fight off lawn insects and diseases without the use of toxic chemicals. For weed-prone areas, consider also applying a pre-emergent made from corn gluten.

Steven M. Zien, executive director of Biological Urban Gardening Services (BUGS) and a member of the Coalition's Advisory Board. Visit BUGS at http://www.organiclandscape.com

WHAT'S NEWS?

Pesticide "Inerts" Pose Dangers to Wildlife
(*Beyond Pesticides*, September 12, 2005)
Scientists are increasingly finding that the toxicity of pesticide "inerts" and their synergistic effects are harming the environment, according to this month's Environmental Science & Technology (EST).

A recent study out of the University of Pittsburgh unveiled that the inert, POEA, found in Monsanto's Roundup harmed and killed the majority of tadpoles at commonly used (and EPA-approved) concentrations. POEA, like all inert ingredients, is not listed on the product's label.

The study is one of several that shed light on the behavior of inerts in the environment, a topic largely ignored by EPA, say many environmental toxicologists inside and outside the agency. As environmental effects often serve as a canary in the coalmine to warn of the potential effects on humans, lack of this data combined with a lack of human health effects data is doubly alarming.

"The inerts evaluation for environmental effects is EPA's dirty little secret," one EPA scientist requesting anonymity told EST. "POEA is likely to be the tip of the iceberg, but we don't know because we don't have data. The agency assures us that everything's okay. On the basis of what? Not data."

In 1995, EPA changed the listing of POEA from "unknown toxicity" to "minimal concern." According to the agency, "the current use pattern in pesticide products will not adversely affect public health or the environment."

Despite growing scientific evidence of the harm caused by inerts used in product formulations such as Roundup, the assessment will likely hold for years into the future.

Even though little EPA data exists for inert ingredients, many are listed as hazardous to human health and the environment by state, federal and international agencies.

Staff scientist Caroline Cox of the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides reviewed the more than 1800 chemicals on EPA's list of inerts categorized as "of unknown toxicity." She found that 75 are listed as hazardous under the Clean Air Act, 52 under EPA Superfund criteria, 64 under the Clean Water Act, 43 under the Toxics Release Inventory, and 78 under the Toxic Substances Control Act. In addition, 292 inerts of "unknown toxicity" are registered by EPA as active ingredients in other pesticides.

To read this article in full, or others on Roundup, visit: www.beyondpesticides.org/news/daily_news_archive/#lawn

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*** THESE LETTERS ARE ALSO ATTACHED BY EMAIL IN WORD FORMAT ***
FOR EASY EDITING OR COPYING AND PASTING

Dear Editor,

Fall is not a typical time for people to think about lawn care, but it is the most important. With a few easy steps (like overseeding, raking, proper watering, and fertilizing with organic matter) people can create healthy soil to support a thick, green, weed-resistant lawn in the Spring. Truth be told, herbicides and other pesticides are not even necessary to have a healthy green lawn, I should know, I have a beautiful lawn and don't use a single pesticide. Lawn chemicals are more dangerous than people think - they are linked to cancer, respiratory disease and other long and short-term illnesses. If my neighbors would stop using those chemicals then their grass would be safe for kids and pets who, EPA says, are more prone to harm from lawn chemicals.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reports that common herbicides applied to urban and suburban lawns are the most frequent contaminants in our streams, lakes and drinking water. Let the tragedy in New Orleans be a lesson to us all to reduce the toxic load we put into our community and our environment. Good tips on natural lawn care can be found at www.pesticidefreelawns.org.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Affiliation if any]
[Your Mailing Address]
[Your Phone]
[Your Email]

Dear Editor,

There is a serious lesson that we can learn locally from the horrific reports of toxic water plaguing New Orleans. If our community were hit with a similar disaster what kind of toxic chemicals would we be faced with? Those homes held not just gasoline, but slews of home and garden pesticides. Pesticides are toxic chemicals linked to a whole host of short and long-term illnesses. Even a small exposure can cause skin irritation, blurred vision, nausea and vomiting – symptoms found in New Orleans – not to mention long-term illnesses like respiratory disease, Parkinson's and cancer. The irony is that pesticides are not even necessary. Almost anything a pesticide would be used for has a non-toxic solution or material available.

Let the tragedy in New Orleans be a lesson to us all to reduce the toxic load we put into our community and our environment. Many organizations offer tips on non-toxic alternatives to pesticides, one is www.beyondpesticides.org or www.pesticide.org.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Affiliation if any]
[Your Mailing Address]
[Your Phone]
[Your Email]