

National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns

Supporting healthy lawns and landscapes without the use of pesticides
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GRASSROOTS NEWS

Dear Coalition member,

Welcome to the National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns! This is our first issue of *Grassroots News*. We are happy to report that everyday more people are signing the Coalition's Declaration on the Use of Toxic Lawn Pesticides and are joining the coalition. To date, we have over 200 members just like you. Tell your friends, pass the Declaration along – the more who sign on, the more decision makers will see just how popular this pesticide-free movement is.

In April, the Coalition publically called on Home Depot and Lowe's Home Improvement to carry a full range of natural lawn and garden products. We also asked the companies to train staff on natural lawn care, to reconsider the sale of "weed and feed" and to dialogue with us to help them do this. We have finally heard back. Both companies essentially say they are already carrying natural lawn products and that product mix per store depends on demand. Our information tells us that neither company does any market research to determine demand; but instead bases demand solely upon sales. Our response was, "We understand that the company stocks the shelves depending on demand, but we also understand that the demand level is artificially skewed on two levels. The natural product(s) are completely eclipsed by the vast amount of toxic products, and customers are automatically referred to toxic products because staff do not understand or know how to explain natural alternatives." Given the responses from the companies, it's time to show them we mean business.

ACTION OF THE MONTH: Take-In Letter To Home Depot

Please help get Home Depot to start selling a full range of natural, non-toxic lawn and garden products by dropping off the "Take-In Letter" below at the customer service desk of a Home Depot near you.

Feel free to include your own message to the store manager on the bottom of the letter. Our goal is to have 5,000 letters delivered by **August 1, 2005**. So please pass this e-newsletter or the Declaration on to your friends and family. Please be sure to let us know if you are participating in this important action.

Home Depot wields tremendous power - in the creation of both supply *and* demand - and could be doing much more to support sustainable land practices that won't pollute our bodies and our environment. Surveys indicate that the demand for natural lawn products is substantial and that the smallest amount of education about the harmful effects of pesticides leads most people to opt for alternatives. The Take-In Letter will help convince Home Depot (a) to break the grip of the chemical industry and start supplying the demand for natural products while still making a profit and (b) to be the socially responsible company it says it is.

If you would like to contribute to an on-going national survey of Home Depot's inventory of toxic vs. non-toxic lawn products, please fill out the survey as you go in to drop off your letter and return it as instructed. The survey will help you see exactly why this campaign is so urgent!

TIMELY TIP OF THE MONTH

On warm summer evenings many people relax outside while they irrigate their lawn, yard and garden. It's soothing and they want to help their plants cool off after a hot day. However, this enjoyable practice has the potential to do much more harm than good, at least for your plants.

Irrigating late in the day leaves plant foliage wet and cool all night long, providing ideal conditions for plant diseases like mold to develop. Plants start looking sick and many gardeners reach for pesticides to kill these invading diseases. You can avoid most plant diseases with proper irrigation timing. Most plant diseases need six hours of cool, moist conditions (which is exactly what is created when you irrigate in the late afternoon or evening).

The best time to start watering is about 2 a.m. – presuming you have a timed sprinkler or irrigation system. The air is cool and almost all of the water applied will seep directly into the soil where it benefits your plants. Watering any earlier and you start creating conditions that favor plant diseases. You can continue watering efficiently until about 6 a.m. or 8 a.m. Any later and more of your irrigation water is wasted as it evaporates before getting into the soil.

Feel free to take a cool shower when you come home from work, but wait until the early morning to bathe your garden, lawn and landscape to prevent diseases.

Timely Tips are provided by Steven M. Zien, executive director of Biological Urban Gardening Services (BUGS) and a member of the Coalition's Advisory Board. <http://www.organiclandscape.com>

WHAT'S NEW?

Federal Judge Upholds Local Weed and Feed Ban, Preemption Laws Do Not Apply (*Beyond Pesticides*, June 20, 2005) On June 14, 2005, Judge Barbara Crabb, of the Western District of United States Federal Court (Madison, WI) issued an order upholding a local ban of “weed and feed” products containing phosphorus.

The lawsuit, brought by the chemical lawn industry, unsuccessfully argued that state preemption law precludes Dane County and the City of Madison from restricting herbicide-based products that contain phosphorus fertilizers.

Activists applaud the decision and encourage municipalities across the country with phosphorus problems to follow Madison's lead in passing fertilizer-pesticide product bans in order to protect local water supplies. The National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns has called for a national ban of “weed and feed” products.

The lawsuit was filed in December of 2004 primarily by CropLife America and Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), a Washington, DC-based trade association with a record of twisting the science to favor industry profits over public health and safety.

Dane County executive, Kathleen Falk, Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, and Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission Chair, Brett Hulsey, praised the federal court ruling. “Healthy lakes are vital to making Madison a healthy city,” said Mayor Cieslewicz. “This ruling is a major victory for our regional efforts to improve the quality of our lakes, and protect the health of our citizens.”

Judge Crabb held that the county and city of Madison may legally ban phosphorus, even where it is mixed with pesticides in “weed and feed”

products. She stated that because the ordinance was created to “maintain and improve the water quality in the area’s lakes and rivers” and will keep additional phosphorus from entering the county’s rivers and lakes by diminishing manufacturers’ incentive to add phosphorus to their products, they do not violate any constitutional rights held by the fertilizer industry.

The plaintiffs argued that the state of Wisconsin has a preemption law, which means localities are not permitted to pass policies regulating the sale and use of pesticide products more stringently than state regulations. Because the fertilizer in “weed and feed” products is formulated with pesticides, they argued, it would fall in this category and could not be banned.

In RISE’s 2005 Outlook, RISE president Allen James stated, “We are watching the entire United States, but particularly the border states of New York, Connecticut, Maine, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Washington for any activity relative to banning pesticides, especially for outdoor lawn care and parks. The City of Madison and Dane County have overstepped their boundaries. If we allow these bans to be instituted, we are completely ignoring preemption and what it stands for.” Judge Crabb disagreed and ruled in favor of healthy water supplies.

While local governments once had the ability to restrict the use, sales and distribution of pesticides, pressure from the chemical industry led many states to pass preemption laws that took that right away.

State preemption laws effectively deny local residents and decision makers their democratic right to protect human health and the environment when the community decides that minimum standards set by state law provide insufficient protection. As pesticide pollution and concerns over hu-

man and environmental health mount, states and municipalities are fighting to overturn preemption laws and return the power back to localities. For more information on preemption laws or to start a local pesticide-free lawn campaign in your area, contact Beyond Pesticides.

CONTACT US

Please email Beyond Pesticides at shoover@beyondpesticides or phone 202-543-5450 if you will drop off the Take-In Letter to your local Home Depot.

For more information about this campaign, visit the website at www.PesticideFreeLawns.org



Dear Store Manager:

I am a regular customer at Home Depot and a supporter of the National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns. I was very pleased to recently learn that Home Depot was asked by Beyond Pesticides and Defenders of Wildlife on behalf of the Coalition to carry a full range of natural, non-toxic lawn and garden products, to train staff to be knowledgeable about non-toxic alternatives, and to reconsider the sale of "weed and feed." It is currently impossible to shop at Home Depot and purchase the fully array of products needed to maintain a natural lawn or garden. I would very much like to see not just one or two natural lawn and garden products on your shelves – but a full range by Spring 2006, and therefore strongly support these requests. In addition to carrying these products, I expect Home Depot staff to be able to offer advice in the use and benefits of natural alternatives. As a do-it-yourselfer, I would also appreciate written materials that provide instructions on how to create and maintain a natural lawn.

I would like to shop at Home Depot for my lawn and garden products and will be watching to see if more non-toxic products become available and if efforts are undertaken to train your employees and provide materials on natural lawn care. I urge you to work with the National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns to help make this a reality.

Thank you for listening to my concerns and please convey my support to your corporate headquarters.

Sincerely,