



SO, YOU WANT YOUR HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION (HOA) TO STOP USING TOXIC LAWN CHEMICALS

A homeowner's association (HOA) is a private organization in a subdivision, planned community or condominium that makes and enforces rules for properties and residents. HOAs are often governed by a select board of members or directors.

As you begin, please keep in mind that this can be one of the more difficult levels at which to organize for pesticide reform. Entrenched culture regarding lawn esthetics along with strict legal structures can lead to long and draining (even litigious) battles regarding pesticide use.

The good news is that you can accomplish a lot by talking to your neighbors. If you can get an energized group together and find allies on the board, then [you can make headway in changing HOA pesticide policy](#).

You may be motivated to take action because of glyphosate (the active ingredient of RoundUp) or some other individual chemical. RoundUp is a great starting point that has garnered a lot of public attention recently, but we would (emphatically!) caution that ***a single-chemical ban is not going to end the problem; replacement herbicides can be just as harmful or even worse***. We refer to this as a “whack-a-mole” chemical approach. Instead, we advise advocates to push for a more comprehensive policy that mandates principles from [ecological pest management](#) and organic land management.

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BEGINNING EDUCATIONAL TOOLS:

Organic lawn care

- [COST COMPARISON: Organic vs. Chemical Land Management](#)
- [Ecological Pest Management](#)
- [Lawns and Landscapes Overview](#)
- [Organic Lawncare Information](#)

Organizing

- [Tools for Change – How to Organize in your Community](#)
- [Pesticide-Free Lawn Door Hangers](#) – great for engaging with neighbors!
- [Movement factsheet](#)

ORGANIZING STEPS

1. Do your research and pin down talking points.

Key points of focus should include *preserving human health, cost-savings, and environmental protection* (See our [movement factsheet](#)). Look for organic or least-toxic land care providers in your area. Expect the concerns – particularly financial – and be assured that non-toxic, esthetically pleasing lawn care is absolutely possible, affordable, and valuable for your neighborhood.

2. Find allies and give yourselves a name.

If “Non-Toxic Squirrel Hill” consistently shows up at board meeting armed with facts, figures, and alternatives, they will be hard to ignore. ***An organized group with a clear agenda is more likely to gain political power and make a difference than one individual.*** Consider writing letters or creating a petition to show the HOA board you’ve got the support of the community behind you. This is also a great way to gather names and contact information of like-minded individuals in the neighborhood.

3. Educate Your Community and Harness Your Political Power

Gain attention for your cause by holding educational sessions with local experts in natural lawn care, human health, and/or ecological sustainability. Find experts by reaching out to local environmental and gardening groups, progressive businesses, health practitioners, or area colleges and universities.

Use these sessions to build your base of support; invite as many people as you can, and make sure to gather contact information. With work moving increasingly online, feel free to use Zoom or other virtual meeting tools – these sessions don’t have to occur in person! ***Further consider starting a petition, if you haven’t already.***



4. Find a champion on the board.

Any organizing requires mapping decision-makers and targeting those who are likely to pick up and

carry the cause with you. If possible, find a sympathetic board member and work with them individually.

5. PERSIST

Persistence is *the most important aspect* of any organizing cause. Of course, it is okay to take some time off for self-care and reflection. But if you continue to return to your efforts, eventually you will see results.

6. Take it to the city level and champion local legislation.

You can, additionally, look at city-level policy change. Many communities are moving to organic land management. You may run into issues with [state preemption](#) if you are trying to eliminate toxic pesticide use on private property. Please contact us at info@beyondpesticides.org or give us a call at (202) 543-5450 when you're ready to look at legislation!

WRITING A LETTER OR PETITION - TIPS

Writing a letter or petition is a simple, effective way to spread the word about the benefits managing landscapes, buildings, and your entire community without the use of hazardous pesticides. You can refer to the substantive talking points listed below for general pesticide facts but try not to rely on them too heavily. Your letters or petition must reflect the unique conditions surrounding the issue you are addressing and works best if you include your personal story.

- **Call out** decisionmakers directly by name
- **Keep** it *under 500 words*.
- **Focus** on the positive aspects of your goals.
- **Be concise** and summarize your position in the first sentence.
- **Pay attention** to spelling and grammar.
- **Add** a personal touch.

See examples on the following pages.

PETITION DRAFT OUTLINE

(If an email format, include links to resources. If it is a physical document, print out and include reference materials. You can also cite your research in the footnotes – this adds a dash of professionalism and gives direction for when the reader wants to learn where you got your information from!)

[Name of HOA] must transition away from chemical-intensive management practices. The detrimental impact of toxic pesticides on human health and the environment is alarming to us, the residents of [HOA]. Fortunately, organic practices provide a healthy and cost-effective alternative.

Exposure to toxic pesticides poses acute and long-term threats to our [health](#). [Children](#), pets, and immunocompromised individuals are more susceptible to the impacts of the toxic pesticides used in our community. Toxic chemicals contaminate waterways and poison non-target organisms. We find this harm to our children, our pets, and our disappearing wildlife to be both unacceptable and avoidable.

You can cite specific studies or data that feel relevant to you and your community. See [Beyond Pesticides](#) website for inspiration! [Children](#), [Pets](#), [Pollinators](#), [Pesticide-Induced Diseases](#). For example:

- *The American Academy of Pediatrics, [in a landmark report on children and pesticide use](#), wrote, “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.”*
- *[New research published in the academic journal Science](#) finds that over three billion birds, or 29% of 1970s abundance have been lost in North America over the last 50 years.*

Organic land management address root causes of pest problems such as compacted soil or nutrient imbalance. Cultural practices such as over seeding, aeration, deep watering, and adding soil amendments builds healthy soil. Healthy soil supports vigorous plant life and provides a nontoxic environment for all living organisms. An organic approach saves over time as costs of material inputs decrease. [See the Beyond Pesticides cost comparison fact sheet.](#)

[HOA] will make itself a model for other community associations by moving forward with organic land care. A healthy, toxic-free environment is a great “draw” to bring in young families and raise property values. Non-toxic, esthetically pleasing lawn care is absolutely possible, affordable, and valuable for our neighborhood. We look forward to working with you to make this happen!

Sincerely,

[Group Name, signatures]

PERSONAL LETTER DRAFT OUTLINE

Dear [Decision-maker],

I hope this letter finds you well. I am requesting that [name of HOA] transition away from chemical-intensive management practices because I am concerned about the detrimental impact of toxic pesticides. What more, toxic pesticide use is not necessary because organic practices provide a healthy and cost effective alternative.

I became aware of the issue with toxic pesticides when...

... I stepped outside after the lawn company visited and developed a headache.

... My dog developed cancer.

... I read about the collapse of insect and bird populations across the globe.

Upon further research, I found that **toxic pesticides are harmful to human health, pets, and the environment.** (Choose 1-3 data points from peer-reviewed studies that are relevant to your letter. See [Beyond Pesticides' website for inspiration! Children, Pets, Pollinators, Pesticide-Induced Diseases](#))

- [A 2015 study in Pediatrics](#) found that residential exposure to herbicides during childhood increases the risk of leukemia by 26%.
- Dogs whose owners' lawns were professionally treated with pesticides were associated with [a significantly higher risk \(70%\) of canine malignant lymphoma.](#)
- A [systematic review](#) of insect population studies worldwide reports on "the dreadful state of insect biodiversity in the world, as almost half of the species are rapidly declining and a third are being threatened with extinction."
- [New research published in Science](#) finds that over three billion birds, or 29% of 1970s abundance have been lost in North America over the last 50 years.

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[HOA] will make itself a model for other community associations by moving towards organic land care. I believe this could be a great "draw" to bring in young families and raise property values. I am currently a [renter/owner], however I cannot continue to live happily in this community when there is a toxic chemical risk to my family outside my door. Non-toxic, esthetically pleasing lawn care is absolutely possible, affordable, and valuable for our neighborhood. I look forward to working with you to make this happen!

Thank you,