



Position Paper on the Safe Playing Fields Act – 5/2013

The State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) of the Junior Leagues of New Jersey, which represents approximately 3,000 women in New Jersey, was founded on the premise of advocating on behalf of Women and Children. SPAC's Legislative Priorities include environment as it relates to the health of children. The Safe Playing Fields Act (A2412/S1143), which restricts the use of lawn care pesticides at child care centers and certain schools, playgrounds, and recreational fields effectively reduces the exposure of harmful chemicals to children. SPAC supports the Safe Playing Fields Act and the reduction of chemicals to which children are exposed.

There is a growing concern about the link between a child's exposure to pesticides and long term health issues such as asthma, cancer and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).¹ In November 2012, the New Jersey Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy statement and technical report which illustrates the dangers associated with children's encounters with pesticides.² Further, the AAP supports the Safe Playing Fields Act and is concerned about the inadequate protection provided to children through the management of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). During recess, sports and other recreational times New Jersey children are unnecessarily exposed to pesticides used during regular field and grounds maintenance.

Fields maintained without toxic chemicals can perform just as well as those managed with conventional lawn care pesticides, ultimately offering greater drought tolerance and requiring less water consumption. The stronger soil and turf of an organically maintained field also inhibits the presence of the types of bugs and insects that appear when the soil biology has broken down due to repeated chemical application. A healthier soil and turf reduces or eliminates the need for a "rescue" product for a depleted field.

New Jersey's current IPM law requires that schools use the least toxic means to manage pests. In practice, however, the law is not sufficient to protect children from the harmful effects of pesticide exposure. Schools are supposed to use low impact or nontoxic methods as the first line of defense and keep records of their efforts. But there is no enforcement mechanism, so in reality chemical pesticides are routinely being used at day care centers, schools, parks, playgrounds, and ball fields.

Arguments have been made that the Safe Playing Fields Act is fiscally irresponsible. However, a cost comparison of conventional (chemical) turf management and natural (organic) turf management shows a cost savings of more than 7% using natural turf management over 5 years. Once the natural turf is established, cost savings of greater than 25% can be realized.³

Concern has been expressed over an increase in insect-borne diseases when lawn care pesticides are eliminated. The Safe Playing Fields Act allows for emergency response to an immediate threat to human health, which should eliminate concerns of an increase in such disease. For the safety of the children, the Act further restricts a child's access to pesticide treated areas for at least seven hours after the emergency application.

There are *distinct and disproportionate risks to children* when exposed to pesticides; therefore SPAC supports the Safe Playing Fields Act. Prohibiting the use of lawn care pesticides in certain areas reduces the exposure of children to harmful chemicals that have been linked to various illnesses and such as cancer, asthma and ADHD.

1. Pesticide Action Network. *A Generation in Jeopardy: How pesticides are undermining our children's health & intelligence* October 2012.
2. American Academy of Pediatrics, Technical Report, Pesticide Exposure in Children, Pediatrics Volume 130, Number 6, December 2012.
3. A Cost Comparison of Conventional (Chemical) Turf Management and Natural (Organic) Turf Management for School Athletic Fields, Grassroots Environmental Education. Charles Osborne & Doug Wood. March 2010