

## **Connecticut Bans Pesticide Use On School Grounds, Should You Use Them In Your Yard?**

We use billions of pounds of pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides globally as a weapon against weeds and to kill the bugs that infect our crops and spread diseases. These compounds keep our lawns weedless and green, while holding diseases like malaria in check. They also coat our produce and end up in our waterways. And many of them are carcinogenic and have been linked to depression, birth defects, ADHD, Diabetes, and even Parkinson's.

There may come a time when you need a pesticide to maintain the crab grass that is taking over your lawn or rid your property of one of the many stubborn invasives that plague much of our landscape these days such as Bittersweet or Japanese Knotweed. In preparation for that time, it will help to understand some basics about pesticides, as well as some common sense tips for pesticide safety.

Pesticides are chemicals that are used to control pests. They include insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and others. For a pesticide to be effective, it must interfere with the normal development of the pest without doing harm to the host. This does not mean all pests will be eliminated. In fact, your pest problem might not be severe enough to warrant the use of a chemical. For instance, a few dandelions in the lawn can easily be removed by hand. One should only use pesticides as a last resort. Wherever possible, use organic pesticides. If absolutely necessary, use toxic chemicals with the greatest care.

Insecticides are pesticides that are used to control insect pests. Insect damage is done by insects that chew leaves and roots and by insects that pierce the plant and suck sap from the plant. Insecticides that control root-feeding insects may be applied as granules with a lawn spreader or with a sprayer in liquid form. Either way, it is important to wash the chemical into the soil and prevent children and pets and wildlife from resting on the lawn for the safety period specified on the pesticide label. Top-feeding insects, which feed on the leaves of ground covers and turf, are best controlled by spraying the pesticide and allowing it to dry on the foliage. The pesticide's effectiveness is lost if it is washed off by rain or irrigation.

Herbicides are pesticides that control weeds. Weeds are divided into two main categories. Perennials, which may be broad-leaf or grassy, live for many years. Annuals, either broad-leaf or grassy, live for only one season and reseed. Pre-emergent herbicides are used to prevent the germination of many weed species, mostly annuals. They are often used early in the spring to prevent weeds, such as crabgrass, from germinating in late spring. Postemergent herbicides are directly applied to newly germinated or established weeds. Broad-leaf weeds and perennial grasses are most often treated with a postemergent herbicide.

Planting native vegetation and using mechanical, biological and nontoxic vegetation control methods are effective in reducing and eliminating pesticide applications. Creating and encouraging stable, low-maintenance vegetation is a more permanent vegetation management strategy. The establishment of desirable plant species that can out-compete undesirable species requires little maintenance. Although native vegetation may take more time to establish itself, native flower and grass species are better adapted to local climate and stress than those introduced from Europe and Asia. Native plant species are especially effective in providing increased erosion control, enhanced aesthetics, more stable wildlife habitats and biodiversity. Numerous states have established roadside wildflower programs for these reasons.

Millions of miles of roads, utility lines, railroad corridors and other types of rights-of-way (ROWs) in the US are treated with herbicides to control the growth of unwanted plants. Increasing public concern over the use of dangerous and inadequately tested pesticides has resulted in an increasing effort to pass state laws and local policies requiring notification of pesticide use, restrictions on application types and implementation of less toxic approaches to vegetation management. However, ROW management is governed by many different levels of government, including state laws or administrative procedures, state subdivisions' or local government entities' policies, and voluntary agreements. As a result, the level of protection varies considerably and tends to be deficient in protecting the public from the potential exposure to pesticide applications along ROWs.

Many states, including Connecticut, have addressed the issue of ROW herbicide applications by notifying the public of the application,

enabling people to better protect themselves from pesticide exposure. Connecticut requires that any electric, telephone or telecommunication company that provides for the application of pesticides within a ROW maintained by the company must notify owners, occupants or tenants of buildings or dwellings abutting the ROW at least 48 hours in advance. If the company provides for the application of pesticides to any utility pole, after it has been installed, it is required to post a notification sign on each pole. If the company provides for the application of pesticides in connection with tree or brush removal from private property, the company must get consent from the occupant before proceeding. State, municipality, pesticide application business, public service company or railroad company ROW applications are exempt from the notification requirements. The General Statutes also prohibit the aerial application of pesticidal dusts within 100 feet of a public highway and the aerial application of broad-spectrum chemical pesticides for nonagricultural purposes. Several towns in Connecticut (Roxbury, Branford, Essex, and Plainville) have successfully passed regulations to regulate applications of pesticides and fertilizer.

The Connecticut legislature passed a law (P.A. 09-56) banning lawn care pesticide applications on the grounds of day care centers, elementary and middle schools (grade 8 and lower) as a result of residents' concerns about children's health and the environment. This ban went into effect for day care centers on October 1, 2009 and for K-8 schools on July 1, 2010. Some Connecticut municipalities have gone beyond the requirements of the law and have stopped using pesticides to manage turfgrass on all their municipal properties.