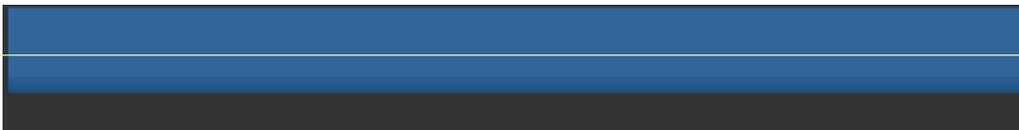


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Rich East Business Professionals Of America Rocket To Success:

Trying To Ban Pesticides? Get Your Strategy Correct First

THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2012 20:11 PAUL TUKEY SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL



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MAINE--(ENEWSPF)--February 23, 2012. It's been a full generation now, 21 years this May, since the town of Hudson, Quebec, became the first community in North America to ban pesticides — weed killers, insect killers and fungicides used for aesthetic purposes. And it's amazing that now, all these years later, the same exact arguments that preceded the Hudson prohibition in the 1980s are being played out in town after town in North America every single day.

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The advocates for safety point to overwhelming scientific evidence that the synthetic chemical products are dangerous for children, pets and the planet. The chemical industry — manufacturers, distributors and end users — claim the science is inconclusive about pesticide safety issues and that achieving attractive lawns and playable sports fields is impossible without the fast-acting chemical products.

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And so the beat goes on. Just yesterday in Hartford that state's legislature heard from a handful of municipal sports turf managers who claim their fields are now unplayable seven years after that state implemented this nation's first ban on pesticides on school grounds. Backed by the chemical industry, these folks want Connecticut's historic ban overturned.

This past Monday the city of Coquitlam in British Columbia voted 7-2 in favor of a pesticide ban, but at the provincial level in Canada's westernmost region, the elected officials still can't come to terms on whether or not to join six other Canadian provinces in regulating pesticides. Meanwhile, next Monday, Feb. 27, in Washington, D.C., a hearing will be held that would regulate pesticides on all publicly owned property in the District of Columbia. The wrangling and level of stress on both sides of the debate is immense.

As someone who's now asked to consult on or at least chime in with virtually all these initiatives, it's enough to make a head spin. For my family, who can barely keep track of where I'm flying next, the battle seems steeply uphill and tiring.

And then the emails come — "Thank you for making us aware." "Thank you for leading the charge!" "I had no idea about Miracle Gro and weed 'n feed until I heard your talk." "God bless you." — and we keep going.

TO BAN, OR NOT TO BAN, IS THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

Some folks, myself included, loathe the idea that we need more legislation to force us to do something. The problem is that right now in the U.S., in most cases, the only law regarding the the applications of fertilizers, weed killers, insecticides and fungicides is the language printed on the label of the package. The "label is the law," I've heard the chemical industry state on countless occasions. "It's not our fault if someone doesn't

follow the law."

The problem, of course, is that the EPA itself estimates that more than 80 percent of homeowners don't thoroughly read labels on packaging. And, in one of the true incongruities of this issue, trained professionals need a license to

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apply lawn and garden products that have an EPA label, yet homeowners do not. On every bag of EPA registered pesticides in the U.S. the label — the law — says “Caution, Warning or Danger: Keep out of the Reach of Children.” Yet how many weekend warrior lawn care moms and dads keep their kids indoors on Saturday afternoon after they applied the weed ‘n feed on Saturday morning? How many of them wear the proper protective gear? How many of them dispose of the un-used products properly? How many observe wind speeds and weather reports?

So, yes, stronger legislation is needed to protect people from themselves, and from some companies who apply pesticides anytime, anywhere without regard for health and the environment. But what kind of legislation is realistic?

BE CAREFUL WITH THE WORDING OF THE BILL

The impulse from the activists is to ban it all. If it’s a synthetic chemical, just be rid of it. And without debating the rationale of that, it’s suffice to say that’s just not realistic.

With regard to lawn and garden pesticides bans, the best model comes from Canada where the words “aesthetic” and “cosmetic” are front and center. Canadian towns and provinces still allow pesticides to be applied for health-related reasons — bed bugs, mosquitoes, ticks and even weed control if the weeds in question pose a public health problem. In the Hudson Supreme Court case in 2001, which Hudson won 9-0, the Court concluded that pesticides should not be applied just for the sake of aesthetic and cosmetic appearances. Eleven years after that decision, more than 80 percent of Canadians now live under the protection of laws that make it illegal for mayors, landscapers and homeowners to apply toxic substances like Roundup and weed ‘n feed simply because they don’t like the weeds on their properties.

As much as it’s tempting to reach further on the bans, I always advise people to limit their initial attempts at pesticide bans to those synthetic products used to kill weeds, along with the few of the chemicals used for lawn and garden nuisance insect control like chinch bugs or ants. In the U.S., if the ban tries to restrict additional categories of pesticides, the initiative will almost certainly fail.

When municipalities try to do “blanket” bans of all pesticides, that opens the door for the chemical industry to start fear-mongering about bed bugs, ticks and mosquitoes. Concerned parents will phone confused legislators, who will then balk. I’ve seen it happen dozens of times.

CAREFULLY DEFINE “PESTICIDE”

In addition to considering what classifications of pesticides should be banned, or not, it’s important to step back and clearly define pesticide itself. Many natural products that are inherently safe often get swept up in pesticide bans, thereby taking important tools away from landscapers who understand how to grow a beautiful landscape without the toxic side effects.

In some language we’ve seen, anything used to kill a plant or bug is deemed a pesticide. It could be literally be illegal for someone to pour boiling hot water to kill a weed. In more practical terms, products like corn gluten meal — which can be used as a pre-emergent weed control — often wind up banned, even though the stuff is safe enough to eat.

The best pesticide ban legislation will list exempted products, such as those approved by **OMRI**, or those that fall under the **25(B) exemption** from the EPA.

That issue has reared its head in Connecticut, where the ambitious and historic ban in 2005 inadvertently banned some safe, natural and organic products. The activists at that time thought that including a list of exempted products and substances would only lengthen the debate and possibly change the outcome. Ideally, however, a rational approach to approved substances should be observed.

Loads of safe, new products are coming into the marketplace such as weed killers made from naturally occurring chelated iron, or grub controls made from botanical oils or distilled chitin. Any legislation should never take these tools away.

CITE EXAMPLES & EDUCATE

The single best way to get legislation passed is to be able to talk about success stories. The surest way to have a legislative initiative fail is to allow the frustrated and/or greedy lawn chemical industry to carry the conversation.

Yesterday in Hartford a group of municipal groundskeepers and officials stood up and basically said that healthy, playable turf was not possible without pesticides.

“The continued selective and judicious use of pesticides is needed and is only one tool required to maintain safe playing surfaces for student athletes,” said Raymond E. Purtell, Glastonbury Connecticut’s parks and recreation director.

The town manager of South Windsor, Ct., also chimed in.

“It’s an expensive item to go back and redo fields,” he said.

What these men are really saying is they don’t know how to maintain grass without the synthetic chemical products. Connecticut, perhaps, has not done a good enough job with an education program to make its municipal groundskeepers aware of new, natural techniques. Or, in some cases, some folks just don’t want to listen.



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It's incumbent upon all municipalities pondering pesticide bans to commit to ongoing education, either through SafeLawns consulting with us, or training through the Northeast Organic Farmers Association, or through Chip Osborne. He was the director of grounds maintenance in the town of Marblehead, Mass., when that town became the first in the United States to enact a ban on pesticides back in the late 1990s. Marblehead has led by example by maintaining beautiful, playable fields throughout its coastal community and Chip has been in high demand on the speakers' circuit.

Successful efforts need to be celebrated, such as the massive makeover at **Glenstone** in Potomac, Md., or **Harvard University**. Organics saves money, saves time and still delivers beautiful results — but ONLY if the local landscapers or homeowners know what they're doing.

FINALLY . . .

Don't re-invent the wheel. Canada has hundreds of communities that can be consulted about their bans. In the U.S., more than 30 New Jersey communities have enacted pesticide bans on public property and Connecticut and New York have enacted statewide bans on pesticides around schools.

Before you make a single move to ban pesticides, talk to the people who have already had success getting bans passed, and talk to the people who have failed. If you do that, you'll save yourself from a lot of hot air from the synthetic chemical industry and politicians who will most assuredly bluster, block and try to tackle.

Source: www.safelawns.org

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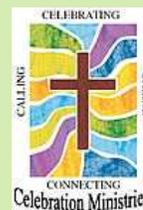
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