

Cleveland Heights Pesticide Ban Serves As Model For The Nation

In 1995 Cleveland Heights became the first city in the nation to pass legislation banning the use of lawn pesticides on all public turf including city, school, library and daycare center grounds. **This was a revolutionary decision.** Why did they do it? What are its consequences? The why is easy: pesticides are poisons. Although they are approved by the EPA, approval does not connote safety even when used as directed. Thus, Cleveland Heights became the first city to formally recognize that people (especially children), pets and the environment should not be unnecessarily exposed to these toxic materials. Indeed, some pesticides have been associated with an increased risk of acquiring asthma; also an EPA report (1996) states that childrens' developing organ systems make them more vulnerable and less able to detoxify these chemicals. Moreover, in 2015 the World Health Organization announced that glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup®, was ranked a class 2A carcinogen, the highest order carcinogen possible based on animal studies.

Consequences of the Cleveland Heights ordinance abound. In 2012, Cuyahoga County Council passed landmark county legislation banning the use of pesticides (outdoor and indoor). **This is a tremendous achievement.** Some observers even called it heroic given the chemical industry's attempt to derail it. Also, at University Circle, all six acres of Wade Oval are now managed organically as are the Cleveland Botanical Garden's grounds. Other major University Circle institutions are in the process of transitioning to natural lawn care. Furthermore, all 29 Cuyahoga County libraries are using natural lawn care practices. Nationally, the ordinance continues to inspire action from the public health community. Indeed, Connecticut (2009) and New York State (2010) banned pesticides from most school grounds and playing fields; Harvard University (2009) adopted organic lawn care and last year, Montgomery County, Maryland with over one million residents banned lawn pesticides on both public and private land within its jurisdiction.

The chemical approach to turf management is to rely on toxic, fossil fuel based synthetic weed killers and fertilizers that destroy beneficial microorganisms in the soil and thus furthers the dependency for more synthetic pesticides and fertilizers (the treadmill). In contrast, a natural systems approach to landscape management demonstrates that you can create healthy soil and turf through organic fertilization, aeration, overseeding, and proper mowing and watering. The key to a healthy lawn is to build up the soil through organic amendments that encourage the growth of beneficial microorganisms. This creates grass roots and turf that are more resistant to weeds and disease.

The pesticide reform movement that started 21 years ago in Cleveland Heights continues to grow. This is similar to the second hand smoke issue because when used, pesticides move through the air, water and land off the target site potentially exposing people to harmful chemicals.

To help make your neighborhood safer educate yourself and your city and school officials about the hazards associated with lawn pesticides and the availability of natural alternatives. Visit our website www.beyondpesticidesohio.org for articles, research, factsheets and videos and learn how citizens can bring about real change. And for further inspiration read biologist Rachel Carson's classic book *Silent Spring* which gives us a lifelong guide to understanding the harmful effects of chemical intensive practices and also a framework for creating a sustainable future.

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