



TOWN OF MADISON  
Buildings & Grounds  
Facilities Office



William H. McMinn  
Director of Facilities

Public Hearing  
Planning and Development Committee  
February 22, 2012

H.B. No. 5155 (RAISED) AN ACT MODIFYING THE BAN ON PESTICIDE APPLICATIONS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

From: William H. McMinn, Director of Facilities, Town of Madison/Madison Public Schools

Good Morning:

My name is Bill McMinn and I am the Director of Facilities for the Town of Madison and the Madison Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I support Bill Number 5155 to allow a thoughtful and comprehensive Integrated Pest Management (also known as IPM) to school grounds. I am speaking today with the support of the First Selectman Fillmore McPherson, and the Acting Superintendent of Schools, Anita Rutlin. For over 11 years, I have been managing the Town of Madison and Madison Public Schools buildings and grounds. My personal experience with grounds maintenance for both the Madison Public Schools and the Town of Madison grounds has proven to me that IPM works effectively and safely to maintain the athletic fields, landscape beds, general grounds around buildings and pavement areas where weeds grow. With the current ban on pesticide and herbicide usage on school grounds, we cannot effectively maintain the grounds.

As a town and school employee, my number one concern at all times is safety to the students, staff, and the public at large. We believe a comprehensive and effective IPM program can be managed for the safety and health of our school community, while also keeping the grounds safe and attractive. Without an IPM program we have noticed that our fields are marginally playable, the grounds around the buildings, pavement areas, sidewalks and landscape areas are unsightly and require many man-hours to maintain at sub-standard condition.

We have been pro-active for over 5 years planning what we will do to address the ban of pesticides. We have met with Dr. Jerry Silbert with The Watershed Partnership, many times to see what will work to maintain the grounds without pesticides and herbicides. The foreman of our grounds department has taken many organic and compost classes and has received certification by the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) Organic Land Care Program. We visited fields in and out of the state that have been organic fields for many years. We did not see an organic field that was at the same standard as our fields that are utilizing IPM programs.

We implemented a "no pesticide program" before the law went into effect, banning all pesticides and herbicides, on all our town and school grounds. Within 18 months, we had a substantial change in the turf thickness on the athletic fields, and weeds were out of control around the buildings and landscape beds.

A few months before the existing law banning pesticide and herbicides became effective, we addressed these weed and turf issues using our IPM program and the areas came back. We continue to use our IPM on town grounds. We follow the law and continue to use non-pesticides with an organic program on the school fields and grounds. The weeds and crab grass came back this summer, more than I have ever seen. You can see the lack of turf/grass on the school fields. We have seen an increase in our costs to purchase and apply organic products, bought new equipment to increase over-seed and aeration capabilities. Even with this additional expense, we are not maintaining the grounds in a manner that we had with the IPM. It is my opinion that the fields will get worse, not better, if we do not change the law to allow the comprehensive and effective IPM programs. In these times of extremely tight municipal budgets, the extra costs to comply with the current laws are challenging and not working.

You can see the poor conditions today if you walk the fields. We need a comprehensive and responsible IPM program for athletic fields; without it, we will have many bare spots with uneven turf, which will cause safety concerns for the athletes that use our fields. We need an IPM to control weeds around buildings, to control weeds in landscape beds, and when we get grubs on school fields, we will need an IPM to keep the field open.

The Town of Madison and the Madison Public Schools have done the following to comply with today's law:

1. Purchased additional equipment at costs over \$40,000.
2. Adding 2 to 3 times the cost for an organic program compared to the IPM program
3. Additional man power to pull weeds.
4. Additional costs for reseeding to try to keep up with the crab grass that dies every year.

If the bill is not passed, we need to plan for:

1. Continue to have playing fields with sub-standard levels, uneven turf and compact dirt spots, as the norm.
2. We will need to buy land to build more fields, to rest fields and re-seeding fields when we get grubs.
3. The demand for synthetic fields will increase.
4. Landscaping around the schools will be removed over time.
5. Weeds will continue to cause maintenance problems for buildings and sidewalks.

Please pass Bill Number 5155 to bring back comprehensive and responsible IPM so we can manage our grounds effectively and safely.