

The Watershed Partnership, Inc.

Testimony to Environment Committee

At Public Hearing on February 25, 2013

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Subject: Pesticide Legislation – Bills SB 914; SB 916; SB 917; HB 6440

Honorable members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Jerry Silbert. I am Executive Director of the Watershed Partnership, a nonprofit environmental organization. I am also a physician trained in pathology and laboratory medicine. Pathology is the study of the causes and effects of human disease. Laboratory medicine involves knowledge about reliability and interpretation of laboratory test results.

Introduction: We all share the commitment to protect Connecticut's children from harm. As a physician and executive director of the Watershed Partnership, I have studied peer reviewed articles in respected journals about lawn pesticide toxicity. I have also seen excellent results with toxic pesticide-free turf care. My conclusion is that **there is no need to put children and pregnant women unnecessarily at risk from toxic lawn pesticides when there are cost effective ways of maintaining both fields and lawns in good condition and suitable for their designated use.**

Examples of successful fields I am most familiar with are in Branford and in Cheshire. They have been not been treated with toxic pesticides for over 4 years and are perfectly playable, proving that the use of toxic pesticides is unnecessary when the fields are properly cared for. Having personally helped in the conversion of the fields in Branford and Cheshire to toxic pesticide-free care, I am convinced that the stories you may be hearing about fields deteriorating without the use of toxic lawn pesticides is because they have not been properly cared for.

What follows are my specific remarks on the bills before you:

SB 917: An Act Authorizing The Use Of Certain Microbial And Biochemical Pesticides And Grub Control Products On School Grounds:

The intension of this bill is to address the complaints of groundskeepers that they have no effective way to deal with grubs and to allow additional safe products that are registered by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Microbial and biochemical products used for lawn care are non-toxic to humans. They are things like milky spoor bacteria and chemicals to attract unwanted insects into traps. Japanese beetle grubs can be killed by milky spoor bacteria.

Your may be hearing from the pro-pesticide camp that there is no suitable treatment for grubs. This is not true. **There IS an non toxic treatment for grubs.** I have seen them work successfully on grub infested fields in Branford for two years. The treatment is a microscopic worm called a nematode.

These microscopic predators seek out the grub and enter into its body. Once it gets in, it multiplies rapidly and kills the grub in 24 hours. Then in a week to 10 days, hundreds of thousands of nematodes break out of the grub's dead body to seek out more grubs. Because nematodes are living organisms they have to be treated and applied with care. They need moist soil because they swim through the soil to find the grubs. The best way to apply them is just before it rains, otherwise they need to be applied to moist soil and watered in with at least ¼ to ½ inch of water. I could go into more detail but the bottom line is that they are totally non-toxic and, if applied correctly, they work. I have observed and personally monitored their successful use for two years.

Last summer in Branford we ran into a problem. There was a significant grub infestation on one of the fields. We had monitored for grubs early and were ahead of the curve. However when we went to order the nematodes the two major suppliers in the U.S. were out of stock and they couldn't supply the nematodes for at least 2 weeks! To avoid severe damage to the field we elected to use a pesticide called Acelepryn. (Note that this was not a school field and was a legal application.) The acute toxicity testing of Acelepryn was so low that the product did not even merit a caution warning. The treatment was successful and after overseeding no damage could be seen after about a month. This is the reason for allowing grub control products that are registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection agency so long as they do not have a "caution," "warning," or "danger" designation on the label.

The way to be effectively control grubs is to monitor the turf for grubs in early to mid August. If the grub count exceeds 6-10 per square foot the field needs to be treated. If it is below this the turf can tolerate the grubs. I have found that, once established, an organic field has a stronger root system and can tolerate a higher population without much damage. It is also important to determine the species of the grub to see what is the most effective treatment. **I have since found there are other suppliers of nematodes for turf grubs and this should be the first line of defense. A chemical treatment should only be the second line of defense.**

SB 914: An Act Concerning The Application Of Pesticides At Municipal Parks:

Small children and pregnant women use municipal parks. Toddlers and children are frequently seen lying on the grass. Young children may put grass in their mouths. Parks are definitely not the place to use toxic lawn pesticides. Bill 914 is very similar to the bill protecting children at day care centers. I urge its passage.

SB 916: An Act Authorizing Civil Penalties For The Faulty, Careless Or Negligent Application Of Pesticides:

Bill 916 is a minor change to the statutes that allows a fine to be charged for faulty, careless or negligent application of pesticides. Heretofore, the only recourse for the DEEP was to suspend or revoke the applicator's certification. This allows a lesser penalty as the DEEP has been reluctant to take more drastic action on the basis of a single incident.

HB 6440: An Act Concerning Municipalities And The Application Of Lawn Care Pesticides:

Bill 6440 would allow a municipality to apply to the DEEP for the authority to regulate selected lawn care pesticides on residential or commercial property, if after due consideration and an official vote, the municipality determines that there are special circumstances that may endanger the health and welfare of its citizens. For example, if a drinking water reservoir is surrounded by property where lawn pesticides are used and are likely to contaminate the reservoir, the municipality may apply for the authority to regulate the kinds of pesticides that are used. The same holds for property overlying a drinking water aquifer's recharge area. It is the burden of the municipality to make a reasonable case and it is the responsibility of the municipality to enforce the authority it is granted. I support this legislation because it provides more flexibility in a municipality's ability to deal with special circumstances with which it is most familiar.

Respectfully submitted,



Jerry Silbert, M.D.