

PSI

Myths and Facts about Turf Pesticides, Children's Health, IPM and Connecticut's Schools

Myth: The pesticides used on school fields are all approved by the EPA.

Fact: Because pesticides are toxic to humans and other forms of life, the EPA requires that they be registered and monitored carefully. This does not imply safety. In fact, it is a violation of federal law to claim that any pesticide is "safe," even when used as directed. No pesticides have ever been tested for their health effects on children. The EPA has stated that "*Laboratory studies show that pesticides can cause health problems, such as cancer, birth defects and nerve damage.*"

Myth: Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs are perfectly safe for children.

Fact: Integrated Pest Management programs were first developed in 1972 and are supported by the pesticide industry because they allow the use of even the most toxic pesticide products. Since IPM programs were first developed, the use of pesticides has dramatically increased. IPM programs leave all decisions about children's exposure to pesticides in the hands of turf managers instead of health professionals.

Myth: Soil compaction is a problem with natural fields.

Fact: Aeration (to relieve compaction) is an essential part of any sports turf program, chemical or natural. Properly maintained natural fields usually have fewer compaction issues because of the active biomass and increased aeration. Compaction is most often associated with poorly aerated, chemically-maintained fields.

Myth: Without chemicals, grubs will ruin my fields.

Fact: Grub infestations typically affect fields that have no natural predators - in other words, fields where pesticides have wiped out the population of beneficial microbes that feed on grubs. Although grubs have been found in natural fields, their numbers are usually limited and there are various natural methods available to address them, including nematodes and Milky spore.

Myth: Natural fields have clover that attracts bees, which can be dangerous for children.

Fact: Clover is a nitrogen-fixing plant that nature has designed to help remediate poor soil conditions. For many years, clover was part of every grass seed mix. Today's seed mixes do not include clover, although new advances in genetics has resulted in "micro-clover" which most turf experts believe will play a crucial role in turf grass fertilization. Existing clover can usually be managed with proper fertilization, soil balancing and over-seeding.

Myth: Natural fields are filled with bare spots, mud holes and other dangerous conditions.

Fact: Fields that have these kinds of problems reflect a lack of knowledge or commitment on the part of turf managers. Chemical pesticides do not grow grass, fill bare spots or prevent mud holes. Every professional turf grass expert and association acknowledges that growing a thick carpet of healthy grass is the best way to combat these problems, and the best way to do *that* is to grow grass, not poison the ground.

Myth: The cost of maintaining fields without pesticides is too high.

Fact: A 2010 white paper report using statistics from the U. S. Sports Turf Management Association and actual case studies of public and private schools using natural turf programs showed that over a five year period, the annual cost of a natural program is less than a program using chemical pesticides. The report is available at www.grassrootsinfo.org/pdf/turfcomparisonreport.pdf

Myth: There are no school systems using natural methods successfully.

Fact: Hundreds of school systems are using natural methods, and many have done so for years. New York State (which has banned pesticides on all school fields) has been a leader in this field, and over the past seven years, hundreds of school personnel have received training in the science of natural turf management.



*Created by Grassroots Environmental Education for the Connecticut Safe Grounds Coalition.
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