

Dear Committee on Children,

I am strongly supportive of HB 6897, an act concerning the application of pesticides at state-operated parks, athletic fields and playgrounds.

I've been learning about the problems with pesticides and have been working to limit their use for almost 40 years. It is very exciting to see this proposed legislation. Thank you so much.

The attached report on an experience with children and pesticides in a park should be informative.

Thanks for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Best regards,

Bill

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Living on the Earth, July 9, 1999: Pesticides in Our Parks

Bridgeport's Beardsley Park stretches south for over a mile along the Pequonnock River, from suburban Trumbull into the gritty center of Connecticut's largest, and one of its most economically-challenged cities. The Pequonnock River empties into Long Island Sound about five miles south of the park.

On the east bank, well-trimmed lawn, large trees and rock outcrops roll gently down to ballfields and the river. The west side of the park and the river has been run over by an eight-lane highway.

One morning in June I was scouting out a picnic site for Suzanne's fifth-grade and her colleague's sixth-grade classes. It was easy to find the right combination of tables, water fountain, ball fields and access to the nature trail. Beardsley Park is a beautiful place, and it was practically empty this weekday. Suzanne and her students feel lucky to have the park within walking distance of school.

As I headed back to Thomas Hooker, I noticed a landscape crew in a small truck spreading something on the grass under the trees. Thinking of the kids about to walk over to the park, I talked to the men while they were refilling the spreader. It took four of them and a large dump truck to keep the application rig supplied. There were already lots of empty bags around. I saw that they had contained a 22 percent nitrogen fertilizer mixed with a broadleaf weed killer called Trimec(tm).

I questioned the workmen about the wisdom of applying soluble nitrogen, a serious environmental pollutant, especially in Long Island Sound. I also asked about spreading a chemical which is designed to kill many useful and edible plants. Of the 33 so-called "weeds" this poison claims to eliminate, at least 15 are edible and many others are medicinal or simply beautiful.

The crew members said that they were just following orders-- "doing their jobs." However, they were interested when I pointed out that the herbicide label required applicators to wear long-sleeved shirts and wash their clothes separately. Several workers were wearing short sleeves.

I reported this situation to the students, who were anxiously awaiting this field trip, and encouraged them to stay off the grass and wash well when they got home. We couldn't say "no" to sixty kids on such a beautiful day. Fortunately, most of their direct contact with the ground involved rolling down hills which were too steep for the pesticide applicators.

Later research revealed that Trimec(tm) is actually three herbicides mixed together: 2, 4-D, dicamba and mecoprop. They are all chemically related and purposely cause "abnormal growth." One half of Agent Orange, 2,4-D is

rated very hazardous. Dicamba seems to be toxic to most animal systems and organs. Trimec(tm) also contains 60 percent so-called "inert" ingredients. "Inert" is just a regulatory code word that allows the chemical industry to withhold ingredient information. Some of them are certainly not "inert." No safety tests have been done on this complex chemical cocktail of powerful, synthetic, biotoxic substances.

Trimec(tm)'s label warned against applying when conditions "favor drift." That day, there was a steady breeze blowing from the northwest. The label also said to avoid contact with skin, eyes or clothing, and to avoid applications over the roots of desirable trees. Although the label on a pesticide container carries the force of Federal law, it seemed that all of the warnings were being ignored.

Five days later, most of the so-called "weeds" in the park were still thriving, although the grass was very brown from being close-cropped during the drought. Of course, both the fertilizer and this herbicide are less effective in dry conditions.

A much more ecologically-beneficial, and less expensive approach would include cutting the grass higher, adding limestone if needed and sowing a bit of clover at the appropriate time.

Spreading soluble nitrogen mixed with toxic herbicides is legal, culturally-correct and encouraged by the chemical industry. It is, however, ecologically, medically, economically and socially insane, especially in this Bridgeport park.

The potential for negative effects from just this one application is enormous. And, it's probably also happening in a park near you. It will only stop when enough of us speak up and object.

This is Bill Duesing, Living on the Earth
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Bill and Suzanne Duesing operate the Old Solar Farm (raising NOFA/CT certified organic vegetables) and Solar Farm Education (working on urban agriculture projects in southern Connecticut and producing "Living on the Earth" radio programs). Their collection of essays Living on the Earth: Eclectic Essays for a Sustainable and Joyful Future is available from Bill Duesing, Box 135, Stevenson, CT 06491 for \$14 postpaid. These essays first appeared on WSHU, public radio from Fairfield, CT.

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