

Written Testimony
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SB 366, An Act Extending the Ban on the Use of Lawn Care Pesticides to Schools that House Grades Nine to Twelve, Inclusive, and to State Facilities

SB 1063, An Act Concerning the Application of Pesticides on School Grounds and Certain Public Spaces, Authorizing the Use of Certain Microbials and Reestablishing the Pesticide Advisory Council

Wednesday, March 11, 2015
Environment Committee

Good afternoon Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban and the distinguished members of the Environment Committee, my name is Erica Fearn, and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Environmental Council. More importantly, I'm a mom of two active daughters who spend most of their time outdoors. As such, the safety and well-being of our state's children is personal priority for me.

SB 366, An Act Extending the Ban on the Use of Lawn Care Pesticides to Schools that House Grades Nine to Twelve, Inclusive, and to State Facilities and SB 1063, An Act Concerning the Application of Pesticides on School Grounds and Certain Public Spaces, Authorizing the Use of Certain Microbials and Reestablishing the Pesticide Advisory Council cause me great concern because they remove the important tools available to protect my kids and their school grounds from harmful pests. They also causes confusion about Integrated Pest Management, which includes the safe and proper use of pesticides to control problem insects and weeds. Some claim IPM will put children in harm's way due to the use of pesticide products when in reality, removing the option to treat harmful pest problems with pesticides in a judicious way, increases children's exposure to health risks caused by weeds, poisonous plants, and stinging insects.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and our state's Department of Environment and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, rigorously review scientific and health data for all pesticide products before they are made available for sale and use. These agencies specifically consider benefits and risks to children when determining if a product can be registered.

As a mother and someone whose family's health has been directly affected by harmful pests, I know it's safer for my children to play on lawns and recreational fields that have been properly and effectively maintained by professionals.

For example, failure to control poison ivy and ragweed can present health concerns, especially among young children, and neglected outdoor spaces can hide stinging insects or other health hazards. In a recent media article, Wallingford buildings and grounds supervisor said the response he received from DEEP when he inquired about poison ivy on elementary property was, "to educate people to stay away from it and to leave it or to remove it manually." In the same article, David Paul, director of school facilities in Meriden, said "some of the things we've been experiencing are clovers and dandelions. We've been attracting a bee harvest. If kids are playing on that field, what if a child was stung and they were allergic?" Effectively controlling these problems helps protect us from diseases, and potentially life-threatening allergic reactions.

While the proposed bills make exceptions for treatment of ticks and mosquitoes in the event of a public health emergency, acting proactively is a better approach when addressing insects that transmit damaging, and sometimes fatal, diseases. How many people must get sick for the health emergency approval process to begin – which in itself will take time? Over the years, Connecticut has consistently reported some of the highest number of Lyme disease cases in the country. Sports fields and backyards lined by our beautiful Connecticut woods present a breeding ground for harmful ticks that carry this disease, leaving children, parents and family pets exposed to unnecessary risk while enjoying the outdoor activities they love.

Keep in mind: pesticides are only one of the tools utilized in an IPM approach. Well-designed IPM programs can reduce pesticide use by using maintenance and sanitation as the first line of defense against insects, rodents, and noxious weeds; however, when pesticide use is necessary, they play a valuable role by preventing pest problems from reaching dangerous levels.

Just as other professionals – police officers, firefighters, teachers, or doctors – are trained to use best practices, so too are our green industry professionals. Pesticide products aren't the only tool in the toolbox, but allowing for their use is important and helps safely protect all of us where we live, work and play.