

School Pesticide Monitor

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Beyond Pesticides / National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides
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Study Finds Pesticide Residues at Day Care Centers Around the Country

In a report released in September, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced that child daycare centers throughout the country expose children to pesticide residues. The study examined 168 childcare centers across the country during a four-month period in 2001. Pesticides were detected in 100% of the daycare centers tested.

"We found at least one pesticide in every daycare center," says lead author Nicolle Tulve, Ph.D., a research scientist with US EPA's National Exposure Research Laboratory.

Sixty-three percent of centers studied reported applying pesticides to the premises; the majority of the pesticides applied were pyrethroids and organophosphates. According to the results, centers use anywhere between one and ten different pesticides at a frequency between one and 107 times a year (or once every three and a half days). The authors conclude, "Results show that there is the potential for exposure to pesticides in child care centers."



Children at daycare facilities are often exposed to toxic chemicals.

Results of this study are particularly disturbing as children, especially young children, are most vulnerable to pesticide exposure. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that 50% of lifetime pesticide exposure occurs during the first five years of life. Additionally, the probability of an effect such as cancer, which requires a period of time to develop after exposure, is enhanced if exposure occurs early in life.

This study provides a teaching opportunity in terms of training childcare workers to manage pests in the safest way possible, says Lynn Goldman, MD, professor of applied health at Johns Hopkins University. "These chemicals should be avoided around children, and if needed, bait traps, which do not leave residues on the floors and surfaces, are preferable, as long as they are kept out of the reach of children," she says.

Integrated pest-management (IPM), which has been embraced by schools throughout the country, can help to reduce or eliminate exposure to pesticides. IPM is a program of prevention, monitoring, and control, which offers the opportunity to eliminate or drastically reduce the use of pesticides, and to minimize the toxicity of and exposure to any products that are used. IPM utilizes a variety of methods and techniques, including cultural, biological and structural strategies to control a multitude of pest problems.

A growing number of states have begun regulating pesticides in daycare facilities. In 2000, Massachusetts passed the *Child Protection Act*, which states that schools and day care centers in Massachusetts must file IPM plans that detail the infestation problems they have and steps taken indoors and outdoors to control them. New York legislators re-

cently introduced a bill to prohibit pesticide applications in daycare centers during business hours. Additionally, California is considering a bill to require daycare owners to notify parents when they are treating for pests.

For more information on your state and local school pesticide laws, visit www.beyondpesticides.org/states. If you are interested in trying to get a law implemented in your state or your town to require daycare facilities and/or schools to reduce pesticide use, contact Beyond Pesticides for resources and tips to get started.

Take Action This School Year

The fall is a perfect time to remind schools about the harmful effects of pesticide use in school buildings and grounds and the effectiveness of non-toxic pest management approaches. Join with parents across the nation and the School Pesticide Reform Coalition (SPRC) as we continue the effort to involve school health staff in reducing pesticide use by sending them "For My Child's Health" postcards asking schools not to apply toxic pesticides on school grounds.

Please consider sending a postcard to ask your child's school not to spray pesticides that contribute to childhood asthma and other harmful diseases. Beyond Pesticides now has full color, 14 page brochures about the link between pesticides and asthma available. Contact Beyond Pesticides at 202-543-5450 or mroberts@beyond-pesticides.org to order postcards or asthma brochures.



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This Fall, Take Simple Steps to Convert Your School's Lawn to Organic

Fall is the best time to start transitioning lawns to organic. Whether your school has an IPM policy in place or not, converting school grounds from chemicals to non-toxic lawns does not have to be a costly or time-consuming process. The key to a healthy lawn is healthy soil and good mowing, watering and fertilizing practices. Healthy soil contains high organic content and is teeming with biological life. Healthy soil supports the development of healthy grass that is naturally resistant to weeds and pests. In a healthy, well-maintained lawn, diseases and pest problems are rare.

But doesn't it cost more you ask? If your lawn is currently chemically dependent, initially it may be more expensive to restore the biological life. But, in the long term, it will actually cost your school less money. Once established, an organic lawn uses fewer materials, such as water and fertilizers, and requires less labor for mowing and maintenance. More importantly, your school lawn will be safe for students to play on.

1. Mow High Until the Season Ends – Bad mowing practices cause more problems than any other practice. Mowing with a dull blade makes the turf susceptible to disease and mowing too close lets sunlight in for weeds to take hold.

Keep your blades sharp, or ask your service provider to make sure their blades are sharpened frequently. For the last mowing of the fall mow down to two inches to prevent fungal problems,

but for the rest of the year keep it at 3-3.5 to shade out weeds and foster deep roots that will be drought resistant.

2. Aerate – Compaction is an invitation for weeds. If your lawn is hard and compacted, and full of weeds or bare spots, aerate to help air, water and fertilizer enter. If you can't stick a screwdriver easily into your soil, it is too compacted. Once you have an established, healthy lawn, worms and birds will aerate soil for free.

3. Fertilize, but Go Easy! – Fertilizing in early fall ensures good growth and root development for your grass. Nitrogen, the most abundant nutrient in lawn fertilizers, promotes color and growth. Adding too much nitrogen or quick release synthetic fertilizers, will result in quicker growth and the need for more mowing. Too much nitrogen can also weaken the grass, alter the pH, and promote disease, insect, and thatch build-up. Soil test results will ensure that you apply only what you need.

Your grass clippings contain nitrogen, improve soil conditions, suppress disease, and reduce thatch and crabgrass. **So leave the clippings on your lawn.** Compost is an ideal soil amendment for organic lawn care. Compost adds much needed organic content to your soil and suppresses many turf pathogens. In the fall and spring, preferably after aerating, spread ¼ inch layer of organic or naturally-based compost over your lawn. Compost tea and worm castings are also great additions.

Look for compost or organic slow release fertilizers at your local nursery or order online. A few fertilizers, such as Safer® Brand All Natural Lawn Restore, are certified by the Organic Materials Review Institute. North Country Organics also has a number of natural fertilizers (www.saferbrand.com and www.norganics.com).

4. Overseed With the Right Grass Seed – Fall is the best time to seed your lawn. Grass varieties differ enormously in their resistance to certain pests, tolerance to climatic conditions, growth habit and appearance. Endophytic grass seed provides natural protection against some insects and fungal diseases - major benefits for managing a lawn organically. Talk to your local nursery about the best seed for your area. Check to see the weed content of the grass seed and that there are no pesticide coatings.

It is highly recommended that you take a soil sample to determine your specific soil needs. Contact your University Extension service to find out how to take and send in a soil sample to test for nutrients, pH, and organic content. Your organic matter content should be around 5% or higher and your ideal pH should be between 6.5-7.0.

For more information on starting and maintaining your organic or natural lawn, and to find local resources in your area see the National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns website at www.pesticidefreelawns.org.