

Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy

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A Survey of School Grounds Pest Management Practices

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A Survey of School Grounds Pest Management Practices

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Objective:

The project was undertaken to understand the care/maintenance of K-8 schools athletic fields and grounds under three management practices: Conventional Pest Management (CPM), Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and “No Pesticide” management. It was important to understand how these three different care regimes subsequently impact and affect the overall quality of the respective school athletic fields and grounds.

The survey was distributed late fall of 2012 to a turf/grounds manager in all 169 towns in Connecticut. Each survey was coded to allow anonymity of each respondent.

- 28% of the towns responded to the survey.
- Of the respondents, there was a larger representation of urban schools systems (urban= town populations \geq than 50,000 residents compared to non-urban (suburban/rural).
- The median income of the towns surveyed was the same as the median income for the state.

Questions were asked as to which cultural practices were used with each of the three management programs and which issues posed the greatest problem to the person charged with the care of the school athletic fields and grounds.

Outcomes:

There were no significant changes in expenses when switching from Conventional Pest Management to an IPM program. There were changes in expenses when switching from IPM to “No Pesticide” management, which includes significant increases in expenses in suburban/rural (non-urban) towns compared to the urban towns.

Weeds were identified as the greatest problem for school grounds managers.

- Crabgrass was the number 1 concern
- Grubs were number 2,
- Broadleaf weeds were ranked as the number 3, with clover noted as a significant problem.

There was a significant decrease in the overall quality of school grounds cared for without pesticides, with the greater decrease in turf quality in the urban schools compared to non-urban schools. [It is likely that suburban/rural (non-urban) schools spend more on alternative care practices compared to urban schools (ie: overseeding volumes increased in suburban schools)].

In general, high schools continue to be managed with IPM programs whether or not a no-pesticide program is mandatory in K-8 grades. Cultural practices at high schools are maintained or slightly increased while cultural practices were reduced in K-8 school turf care plans, regardless of pesticide ban and particularly in urban schools.

82% of towns that responded to the survey did not attempt to utilize EPA 25(b) minimum risk products in their turf care program.

Further inquiry into the impact of the pesticide ban on school grounds is ongoing.