

# New Jersey sports turf managers oppose pesticide ban proposal

**THE SPORTS FIELD MANAGERS OF NEW JERSEY** (SFMANJ) is officially opposing the proposed New Jersey Senate Bill 2610, dubbed the “Safe Playing Fields Act,” calling it “reckless and ill advised.” In a news release, SFMANJ said “The goal of this Bill is to ban the use of most lawn care pesticides at certain child care centers, schools and recreational fields. As sports field managers, we would like to point out how this Bill will cause presently safe sports fields to eventually become unplayable and treacherous.”

The news release continues:

“Unlike a home lawn where the aesthetic is prized, the goal of sports field management is to provide a safe and playable surface. Dense turfgrass provides dependable traction for young athletes’ feet. Strong healthy turfgrass roots won’t blow out when a player stops fast or changes direction in an instant. Soccer balls roll best on a smooth, uniform turfgrass surface, baseballs take fewer bad hops, and kids don’t get hurt. Games are better.

“Sports fields are subjected to considerable amounts of use, abuse and overuse throughout the year. Man-made and natural environmental stresses can cause sports field quality and health to diminish. Drought and other weather extremes, as well as cyclical insect and plant disease pressures weaken even the best sports fields. When a stand of turfgrass established on a sports field begins to thin out, as sports fields are highly prone to, weeds move-in and the sports field begins to go into a state of decline. These problems often occur during the height of the playing season when the field is most needed.

“For example, invasive, summer annual weeds such as crabgrass, goosegrass, and prostrate knotweed are very problematic on intensely used sports fields. Left uncontrolled, the lifecycle of these weeds results in a persistent condition of bare soil during spring and fall, when many sports fields are in full use. Bare soil during wet field conditions constitutes dangerous footing and dry, bare soil is an extremely hard surface. Lawn care pesticides are tools that can be used to manage the encroachment of these weeds and thereby promote a more uniform turfgrass surface—in lieu of the hazardous conditions associated with bare soil.

“White grubs are another detrimental pest to sports fields and severe damage to turfgrass can result in unsafe playing conditions and costly renovation and repair procedures. Turfgrass damage, resulting from both white grub feeding on roots and the activity of raccoons and skunks foraging for the white grubs, can completely destroy a sports field, rendering the surface unsafe and unplayable. A properly timed pesticide application, best applied in the summer when most school fields are not in use, can provide effective, preventative control of these potentially devastating white grub pests.

“Another name for lawn care pesticides is ‘plant healthcare products’. As good stewards of the environment, we need to be able to responsibly use all of the tools available to us to prevent and treat turfgrass problems in a conscientious manner. Low-impact pesticides, while useful in some situations, are not as effective as non-low-impact pesticides when there is a need to control severe weed, insect and disease outbreaks on sports fields. Not all sports field sites are the same. Pest populations fluctuate. Soil conditions and types are different. Field usage varies. Non-low-impact pesticides are generally effective across varying sport field conditions.

“Many sports fields do not have access to irrigation and some low-impact pesticides, particularly nematodes for white grub control, require irrigation to be effective. Certain lawn care pesticides, timed according with irrigation, can be used to quickly respond to pest problems to keep a field safe and open for play—as opposed to forcing field closure and performing costly repair and renovation measures. Having the option of using US EPA-registered products in accordance with their labels allows us, in part, to achieve our goal of keeping sports fields safe and playable.

“New Jersey has a stringent School Integrated Pest Management (IPM) law. In order to use lawn care pesticides on the grounds of a K-12 school campus, one must adhere to many regulations in the NJ School IPM Law. These regulations include (but are not limited to):

- Appoint a school IPM coordinator, develop an IPM policy, and adopt a plan.

- Use low-impact pesticides.
- Attain a NJ DEP Pesticide License in Category 13 to apply non-low-impact pesticides in a school environment.
- Provide annual notification of the School’s IPM policy and 72 hour notice and posting prior to and after a non-low-impact pesticide application to parents and guardians, students and staff, using mail, email, telephone and signage.
- Enforce a 7 hour minimum re-entry period even if the label does not specifically state reentry time.
- Keep detailed records of pesticide applications and manage Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), respond to inquiries, and provide information to parents, guardians, students and staff about IPM.

“The application of a lawn care pesticide takes a considerable amount of forethought, logistics and preparation. In addition, to rigorous planning, lawn care pesticides require monetary resources to purchase and human resources to apply. As sports field managers, we have to provide cost benefit information to our business administrators in order to receive the funding to purchase the materials. If we don’t protect the field from natural or manmade damage, we risk having to spend considerable taxpayer money to replace or repair a sports field damaged by pests. Currently, many New Jersey Schools and municipalities are cutting expenses by eliminating positions and programs. A carefully planned lawn care pesticide application, in full compliance with US EPA registered pesticide label recommendations and NJ School IPM policies, can provide maximum cost benefits by solving a turf health problem quickly and effectively rather than a costly field replacement later and a substantial loss of field space for use by children and parents.

“In the end, our endeavor is to create the safest playing conditions for all of New Jersey’s sports field users.

“We respectfully request that passage of S.2610 be delayed pending the introduction and discussion of additional facts.

“We invite the opportunity to discuss our position with Members of the New Jersey State Senate and Assembly as well as others concerned with the impact of this legislation.”