

**Audubon New York
Citizens Campaign for the Environment
People's Environmental Network of New York
New York Public Interest Research Group
Sierra Club—Atlantic Chapter, Iroquois Group**

Date: April 11, 2006

To: Health Committee Members, Onondaga County Legislature

From: Dereth Glance, Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE); Victoria Baker, People's Environmental Network of New York (pENNY); Melinda Sobin, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG); Martha Loew, Sierra Club – Atlantic Chapter, Iroquois Group; Sean Mahar, Audubon New York

Re: Pesticide Neighbor Notification (PNN) adoption in Onondaga County

We urge the Health Committee to support legislation that will afford Onondaga County residents the right to know before dangerous chemical pesticides are sprayed on neighboring properties by recommending that the Onondaga County Legislature adopt the Pesticide Neighbor Notification Law (PNN).

Since the Neighbor Notification law was passed by the New York State Legislature in 2000, Suffolk, Nassau, New York City, Westchester, Rockland, Albany, Tompkins, Monroe and Erie counties and New York City have adopted and successfully implemented this crucial right-to-know law. Pesticide Neighbor Notification has proven to be successful in each county that chose to require advanced notice to residents. Onondaga County can benefit from the experiences gained in these other counties.

Background

According to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), in 2003, Onondaga County was among the top ten counties in New York State for pesticide use. Over 500,000 pounds were applied commercially; not including homeowner applications or agricultural use.

Pesticides are poisons designed to kill or repel living things. For humans, acute exposure to pesticides can cause rashes, headaches, vomiting, diarrhea, blurred vision, asthma attacks, respiratory distress, seizures, coma and even death. Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to neurological impairment and learning disabilities, immune system damage, cancer, childhood brain cancer and leukemia, hormone disruption, Parkinson's disease, liver damage and birth defects.

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Fetuses, infants and children are at particular risk because pesticides can impede normal physical, mental and neurological development. In addition to their unique vulnerability, infants and children are more likely to come into direct contact with pesticides through typical children's behaviors like playing on the grass, crawling on floors, putting dirty hands in their mouth, etc. Senior citizens and individuals with health impairments, such as respiratory problems and compromised immune systems, are also especially sensitive to pesticides.

Pesticides and herbicides harm birds in three ways: through direct and secondary ingestion, depletion of food supplies, and destruction of essential habitat. Typically, birds and other wildlife that ingest these toxic chemicals are more susceptible to predation and disease, their fertility rates have been known to decrease, they become neglectful of their young and can even abandon nests. Pesticides don't discriminate, attacking any insect unlucky enough to be where the pesticides are, regardless of their impact on the lawn or garden. For birds, this means less food. Lastly, the use of herbicides in destroying "pest" plants, can degrade and destroy essential habitats for many bird species, and destroy many beneficial plants that birds rely on. In all, the impact on birds is staggering, resulting in the deaths of an estimated seven million birds annually.

New York State Pesticide Neighbor Notification

Even when families recognize this risk and choose to either refrain from using these dangerous chemicals or use safer organic alternatives, the risk of exposure still exists. The New York State Legislature enacted the Neighbor Notification Law in recognition of the fact that pesticides frequently drift or spray onto adjacent properties, potentially putting neighbors' health at risk. Even the EPA has acknowledged that "some degree of drift of spray particles will occur from nearly all [pesticide] applications," despite their label restrictions.

The Neighbor Notification Law allows counties to elect to require advanced written notice of pending pesticide applications on adjacent properties be given to homeowners. The law does **not prohibit the use of pesticides**; it simply gives neighbors the information they need to protect themselves and their families, pets, and property. The law only requires that applicators provide notice when spraying the most toxic chemicals. This gives pesticide applicators an incentive to use products that are exempt from notification, such as non-toxic or least-toxic alternatives, which ultimately benefits public health and the environment

Advance notice allows people to take common-sense precautions to minimize exposure to pesticide drift, such as closing windows, keeping pets and kids indoors, covering barbecues, picnic tables, outdoor furniture, vegetable gardens, valuable ornamental plants, and birdfeeders; bringing in children's toys, pet bowls, and laundry. It also allows neighbors to arrange to keep their family away from the area on the day of the application if they feel it is necessary.

It is a shared responsibility to protecting our families' health. Without advance notice, individuals are unable to prevent unnecessary harm that may occur with exposure to toxic chemical pesticides. This law retains the choice to legally apply pesticides; it only requires 48 hour advanced notice of toxic pesticide application. What the Neighbor Notification law does is ensure that neighbors have access to information that can help them make informed choices to protect themselves, their families, pets and property from exposure to hazardous pesticides.

We, therefore, strongly urge the Onondaga County Legislature to enact the Pesticide Neighbor Notification Law permanently in Onondaga County.

For more information, please feel to contact us at:

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