

Pesticides limited at parks

Courier-Post, July 6, 2009

<http://www.courierpostonline.com/article/20090706/NEWS01/907060344/-1/fptowns>

Jane Nogaki launched her anti-pesticide crusade in the early 1980s, when South Jersey towns were using aircraft to spread toxic bug spray and kill gypsy moths.

Now, more than two decades after Nogaki helped inspire towns to switch to a safer airborne insecticide, she and the New Jersey Environmental Federation are trying to clear potent pesticides from another front: public parks.

Since 2007, 31 New Jersey municipalities have followed the federation's advice and established pesticide-free zones in parks. Many also have vowed to minimize their pesticide use on other public property, too.

Cherry Hill adopted the zones in March and has bought 100 signs to advertise the pesticide-free areas. Collingswood took the step in April. Voorhees did so just more than a year ago.

Burlington County leaders agreed to limit pesticide use in their public parks back in 2006.

"We find that there is a lot of public support for reducing pesticides," said Nogaki, a Marlton resident who has campaigned for tighter controls on chemical use for more than 20 years. She is the pesticide program coordinator for the environmental federation.

Nogaki said children especially are susceptible to absorbing pesticides because they often have more contact with the ground and plants. Studies have shown that developmental impairment, birth defects, cancers and other ailments may be linked, in some cases, to excessive exposure to pesticides.

"Every time I would take a walk, I would make the same comment: 'Oh, my God. Why do people have to spray pesticides?'" said Susan Wolf, a Cherry Hill psychologist who pushed the township council there to adopt pesticide limits.

She said she was struck by the volume of chemically treated lawns in her neighborhood. Nogaki said that municipal governments, by employing pesticide-reduction efforts, can spread awareness of the chemicals and encourage residents to reduce their use on private property, as well.

In Voorhees, township Administrator Lawrence Spellman said it wasn't a big deal for the municipality to go pesticide-free in its parks.

"We never were using pesticides" except in cases of major insect outbreaks, he said. "So to go pesticide-free was relatively easy."

He said the township, encouraged by a couple of concerned residents, figured that making a public statement about the absence of pesticides would calm locals who worry about the chemicals and their effects.

Nogaki said the involvement of local residents has been instrumental in advancing the cause statewide. A major element of the educational campaign, she said, is teaching New Jerseyans natural means of lawn care. They include leaving the grass relatively high -- about three to four inches -- and keeping grass clippings on the lawn to recycle nutrients.

Resources are available through www.cleanwateraction.org/njef and www.pesticidefreezone.org.

"Our whole goal is to get more people involved in affecting their town governments'" environmental policy, Nogaki said.

Reach Adam Smeltz at (856) 486-2919 or asmeltz@gannett.com.