

Political Landscape Issues By State



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On the individual states front this year, even more than in years past, we are seeing substantial political activity related to environmental issues, including water conservation, pesticides and fertilizers; workers wages and qualifications via H2-B, minimum wage and overtime pay; [leaf blower bans](#); and newer to the industry's political radar screen: pollinator health.

Pesticides ban in Maine

The city council of [South Portland](#), Maine, passed in September a law to ban certain lawn and landscape pesticides. Several communities in the vicinity of South Portland have indicated a desire to pass similar measures if the ordinance is enacted, including the city of Portland itself. "This is a draconian measure that is absolutely unenforceable, that could profoundly impact our members' companies that service the greater Portland community," says Mendelsohn.

Critics include Tom Estabrook, vice president of Estabrook's garden center in Yarmouth outside of South Portland. He's also president of the Independent Garden Centers of Maine and past president of the Maine Landscape and Nursery Association. "If you put this ordinance in place, you're gonna take pesticides and throw them underneath the rug," he says. "I have customers every day from Ogunquit (where pesticides are already banned) that come in and buy (synthetic) pesticides, take them home and use them. There's an ordinance in place, but it's gonna happen."

Pollinator health in Maryland, Vermont, New Jersey and Connecticut

An ongoing controversy hitting the landscapers' 2016 radar is pollinator health (protecting, birds, bees and bats) and its purported connections to pesticide exposure, especially neonicotinoids (neonics) with honeybees. For example, in Maryland, Vermont and Connecticut new laws were enacted that ban

the retail sale of neonics, but that do not restrict the use of that pesticide class for certified applicators.

“Environmental groups have been very active and vocal on this issue,” says Mendelsohn. “Despite their efforts, we and our industry allies have been able to protect landscape professional’s ability to use this important pesticide class.”

This is an important development for a couple of reasons, according to Mendelsohn. First, lawmakers in these states recognize the professionalism of the industry and recognize the knowledge and training needed for proper pesticide application. Second, many states are looking at ways to protect pollinator health, and it is highly likely that additional measures to limit or eliminate the use of neonics will be proposed by other state legislatures.

Multiple researchers have disputed the claim that pesticides are the main culprit for pollinators decline. Most researchers cite varroa mite infestation and other pathogens as the primary culprit for honeybee declines.

The [New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association](#) supports responsible use of all pesticides by licensed professionals. In a recent positioning statement, the association stated: “When EPA label directions are followed and DEP regulations are abided by, the environmental and personal impacts of these products are greatly diminished.

“Neonicotinoids represent a progressive and low-impact alternative to pest management in both production nurseries and in the landscape. While encouraging judicious and responsible use, good best management practices guided by sound IPM principles, and safe handling and application procedures, the NJNLA strongly opposes a complete ban on an entire class of chemical for use in New Jersey.”

Leaf blower ban in California

More than 400 cities, towns and municipalities nationwide have already restricted the use of leaf blowers or banned them outright, according the the Nationwide Leaf Blower Ban organization. California is front and center in the battle to eliminate leaf blowers or curb their use dramatically. For example, in [Sonoma, California](#), a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers that initially passed the city council in the spring is on hold due to a citizen-driven initiative to put the issue on the ballot. Residents of the community will soon have the opportunity to express their opinion at the ballot box.

The [California Landscape Contractors Association](#) (CLCA) acknowledges and understands that public opposition to the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers based on concerns about sound, dust and air emissions. However, an outright ban of this widely used equipment by landscapers would be the worst remedy, and one that would eliminate its many benefits. The CLCA advocates for more industry-wide training and education.

“Cities, municipalities, and the CLCA should partner together to educate the public as well as the landscape industry about proper use of leaf blower

equipment,” says CLCA Executive Director Sandra Giarde. “A ban should be a last resort and enacted only after exhausting all other alternatives.”

“Our country has never seen an election quite like this one,” says Mendelsohn, “and landscape professionals have numerous reasons to exercise their civic duty by casting a ballot for their candidates of choice the first Tuesday in November.”