

Small Maryland City Takes Strong Stand on Lawn Pesticide Use



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Takoma Park is located in Montgomery County, Md., just northeast of Washington, D.C., and has about 16,000 residents. Depending on your worldview you might describe its local politics as progressive, liberal or whacko; decide for yourself.

Takoma Park:

- allows non-U.S. citizen residents to vote in its municipal elections,
- lowered the voting age to 16 in city elections,
- is a "Nuclear Free Zone"
- was forbidden, by statute, from doing business with any entity having commercial ties with the government of Myanmar. Enforcement of the provision was suspended in the year 2000 after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a similar Massachusetts provision. (*Source: Wikipedia*)

This past June 22, Takoma Park's six-member city council unanimously approved the Safe Grow Act of 2013. The Act restricts the use of most cosmetic lawn pesticides on both private and public property.

Local residents Julie Taddeo and Catherine Cummings drafted the ordinance. The two women began their anti-pesticide campaign in 2011 after seeing residents spray their yards to kill dandelions. Fearful that pesticides are harmful to their children and also the environment, they initially attempted to educate neighbors to quit using lawn care pesticides. Eventually, they launched a full-fledged campaign for a local law to forbid the use of most commonly used lawn care pesticides on public and private properties within their small city. The success of lawn care pesticide bans in Canada inspired them to keep campaigning for the ban.

The Takoma Park Safe Grow Act of 2013 is not a total ban on pesticide use on public and private properties. It applies only to lawns and not to gardens. It also permits the use of herbicides to kill invasive and noxious weeds, and also the use of insecticides to kill disease-carrying insects.

The city will offer public educational materials (brochures, classes and public forums) to encourage compliance with the new restrictions on pesticides.

It is unclear as of this writing how the law will be enforced and any possible penalties for individuals breaking the law. Several residents that opposed passage of the law, said during public hearings that the law risks turning neighbors into "tattlers". Other citizens complained that the law's language is confusing.

Regional lawn care company owners tell *Turf* magazine that Takoma Park, Md., has never been very receptive to professional lawn care. They say the new law will have little effect upon their activity in the Metro Washington D.C. area. The larger threat to professional lawn care companies in the region is the adoption of similar measures by other Maryland communities.

Beyond Pesticides is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Washington D.C., is actively campaigning to do just that. It hailed passage of the Takoma Park Safe Grow Act of 2013. Along with several local lawmakers, Beyond Pesticides encouraged other communities to take similar action. Beyond Pesticides has been a persistent and active critic of the sale and use of traditional chemical lawn care chemicals since the founding of the organization, then known as the Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides, in 1981.

Beyond Pesticides reports that Maryland is one of only nine U.S. states that do NOT preempt local governments from enacting stronger pesticide laws on private property.