

# The Safe Playing Field Act: What's the score?

By **Cheryl Reardon**, ANJEC South Jersey Project Director

**T**he *Safe Playing Field Act* bill (S1143 / A2412) restricts the use of toxic, synthetic pesticides at child care centers, K-8 school grounds, and park playgrounds, and permits their use only as an emergency response to an immediate threat to human health. The bill encourages use of natural methods and “low impact” (nontoxic) pesticides when needed to maintain these lawns/fields more economically, safely and effectively. Its passage would make New Jersey the third state (following similar laws passed in New York and Connecticut) in the growing trend among towns, counties and states to protect the community’s most vulnerable members, the children, from unseen carcinogenic and other health-related dangers during outdoor recreation at school and on playgrounds.

At this printing, the bill has 63 bipartisan cosponsors (a majority of the legislature) and support from many parent, children’s health and environmental groups. The bill will first go before the appropriate legislative committees for a vote this fall. The main opposition seems to come from the chemical industry represented by the New Jersey Green Industry Council.

*The Safe Playing Fields Act* permits the use of synthetic pesticides where children play only in the case of public health emergencies, such as an infestation of hornets, mosquitoes, or ticks that may not be controllable by nontoxic methods. These types of decisions are to be made by local health and school officials who have the best interest of children as their top priority.

“At least 40 towns and many schools in New Jersey have declared their parks pesticide free,” says Jane Nogaki, board member at New Jersey Environmental Federation. “Now it’s time to make all playgrounds and school playing fields pesticide-free.”

## Why this bill is important

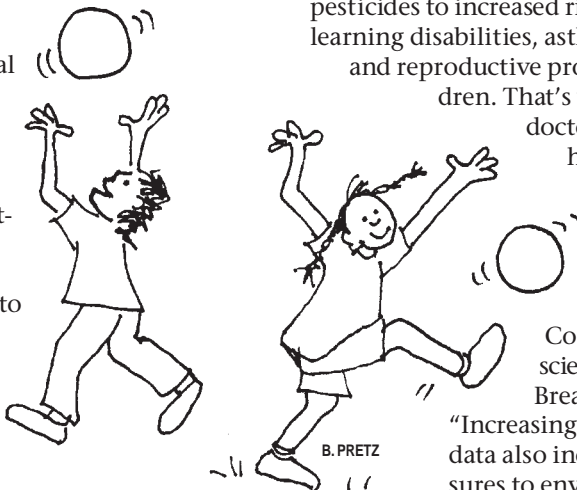
1. Increased protections for children from immediate and long-term threats to health – Peer-reviewed scientific studies published in prestigious medical journals link lawn pesticides to increased risk of cancer, learning disabilities, asthma, birth defects, and reproductive problems in children. That’s why leading

doctors, scientists and health advocates have endorsed this bill.

- According to Janet M. Gray, Ph D., Vassar

College professor and science director of the Breast Cancer Fund,

“Increasingly, the scientific data also indicate that exposures to environmental



toxicants, especially endocrine disrupting compounds, including many pesticides, may lead to increased risk for later development of breast cancer.”\*

- David Carpenter, M.D., Director, Institute for Health and the Environment, SUNY Albany, states, “There is strong scientific evidence that exposure to pesticides/herbicides increases the risk of a child’s development of cancer, especially leukemia.”\*

Read more quotes from doctors and children’s health experts who have testified in support of this bill at [www.northernnjsafeyardsalliance.org/doctors.html](http://www.northernnjsafeyardsalliance.org/doctors.html).

2. Benefits to the economy, school budgets and green jobs – This bill not only better protects kids but is also revenue/job neutral in the short-term because schools can continue to use trained lawn care professionals to maintain their grounds or tend them on their own. It will save schools money within a couple of years due to reduced pesticide expense. And the change can even create jobs as lawn care and field maintenance professionals transition their business practices to rely less on synthetic chemicals and more on safer, more effective alternative treatments.

W. Danzy, Director of School Buildings and Grounds at East Orange High School, which recently switched to organic field care, reports that, “The results have been outstanding and we had no problem fitting this into our budget.” (Read what other local school field managers, turf professionals and national experts who use natural and organic methods say at [www.northernnj safeyardsalliance.org/turfpros.html](http://www.northernnj safeyardsalliance.org/turfpros.html) and [www.northernnjsafeyardsalliance.org/buildinghealthylawns.html](http://www.northernnjsafeyardsalliance.org/buildinghealthylawns.html).)

3. Strengthens the current *School Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Act* as it applies to outdoor pest management.

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\* Stated in a March 2011 letter to S2610 sponsors.

Because it is currently legal under *IPM* regulations to use synthetic pesticides for turf maintenance at schools, many have not yet embraced the safer, more natural alternatives. This new bill will make it explicit that toxic, conventional synthetic pesticides may only be used outdoors at schools and park playgrounds when there is a public health emergency. Low-impact (nontoxic) pesticides are still allowed to be used. And to help schools enhance their turf management practices, fully-funded training in natural and organic methods will be offered to every day care center and school in the State once this bill passes into law.

## **Actions for environmental commissions and town leaders to consider**

**PASS A RESOLUTION** – Recommend that your town council pass a resolution in support of the *Safe Playing Fields Act* and have it sent to your district legislators (find them at [www.njleg.state.nj.us/districts/municipalities.asp](http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/districts/municipalities.asp)) as well as Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Oliver. Hearing from towns throughout the State will encourage the legislative leadership to get this bill posted for a vote.


Montclair Township passed such a resolution this spring that can be used as a sample: [www.montclairnjusa.org/dmdocuments/R\\_12\\_116.pdf](http://www.montclairnjusa.org/dmdocuments/R_12_116.pdf). Please note that while the *Safe Playing Fields Act* covers day care through eighth grade, Montclair’s resolution also includes language discouraging use of pesticides on their high school fields.

For materials and advice to support your discussion with your town government and/or to join a teleconference this fall that will address your questions, please contact Suzanne Aptman at the Northern New Jersey Safe Yards Alliance: [Suzanne@NorthernNJSafeYardsAlliance.org](mailto:Suzanne@NorthernNJSafeYardsAlliance.org), (973) 744-2294.

**GET MORE COSPONSORS** – If your local legislators are cosponsors of the bill, ask them to do what they can to get the bill posted for a vote this fall. If they are not yet cosponsors, ask them to sign onto the

*Safe Playing Fields Act* (A2412 / S1132). Write a formal letter or set up a meeting to discuss why this bill is important. Find out whether your legislators are cosponsors at [www.njleg.state.nj.us/bills/BillView.asp](http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bills/BillView.asp).

For more general information on nontoxic lawn care and how to get your town to pass a pesticide-free resolution for local parks, see:

- NJ Environmental Federation's Fertilizer Free campaign at [www.cleanwateraction.org/feature/pesticide-and-fertilizer-free-campaign/](http://www.cleanwateraction.org/feature/pesticide-and-fertilizer-free-campaign/);
- Beyond Pesticides' lawn care program at [www.beyondpesticides.org/lawn/](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/lawn/);
- The Northern NJ Safe Yards Alliance at <http://safelawnsmontclair.org/>. 

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