

Beyond logic?

What are people telling your customers about the value of turf?

BY NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As landscape professionals, you may be faced with questions regarding pesticides and the effectiveness of the tools you use every day. It's important to be aware of "what you're up against" when it comes to the information your customers may be getting from groups who oppose the use of pesticides.

In April, the 28th National Pesticide Forum, "Greening the Community," was held by Beyond Pesticides in Cleveland. During the opening session, "Pesticides 101," Caroline Cox, a Beyond Pesticides board member and research director for the Center for Environmental Health in Oakland, Calif., outlined the "10 Reasons Not To Use Pesticides," renaming her session to clarify her message.

Here are a few of the points this organization is spreading to your current and potential customers.

› **Pesticides don't solve pest problems.** "If pesticides really solved pest problems, we wouldn't use them repeatedly," Cox explained. "Every year in the U.S., a billion pesticides are used. The amount isn't going down."

› **Pesticides are hazardous to human health.** Three hundred million pounds of cancer-causing pesticides and 150 million pounds of pesticides that cause reproductive problems like miscarriages or birth defects are used annually, Cox told the group.

› **Pesticides cause special problems for children.** "For their size, children drink more water and eat more food than adults do," she said. "Their play exposes them to pesticides. They do somersaults on the lawn and they sprawl out on the carpet to read a book. All of these things increase their exposure to pesticides."

"Kids are also growing and developing," she added. "If they are exposed to pesticides when they are at a critical stage of growth or development and their growth changes, this is something have to live with for life. For instance, some common pesticides appear to affect the developing brain so a child's brain will be different when they grow up."

› **Pesticides contaminate water and air.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Monitoring Program found 57 pesticides in public drinking water samples in 2009, and the U.S. Geological Survey found pesticides in 90% to 100% of rivers and streams they tested in 2006. After stating these facts, Cox concluded that "pesticides used on lawn and roadsides do end up in urban streams and rivers."

› **Pesticides are hazardous to fish and birds.** "We share the planet with other living things and they pay the price as a result of our pesticide use," Cox said, adding that 100 million pounds of pesticides per year kill fish, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

› **Pesticide health and safety testing is conducted by pesticide manufacturers.** "The government does not test pesticides – they



ask companies that make them to test them," Cox said. "If you profit from a product and test it, isn't there a built in conflict of interest?"

› **Pesticides are hazardous to pets.**

"A good way to talk to people about pesticides is talk to them about pets," Cox offered the group, adding that the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reported more than 30,000 pesticide poisoned pets in a single year (2005). She also pointed specifically to the use of lawn care herbicides as a reason for the increased risk of pet cancer.

› **Pesticides have too many secrets.** Pesticide ingredients are divided into active and inert, Cox explained, "so you wouldn't know exactly what chemicals were used on your block because a good percentage of them could be inert and not listed on the label."

Do yourself — and your industry — a favor and become educated about the benefits of pesticides and be prepared to speak knowledgeably when faced with questions regarding their harmful effects.

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