



A Message from The President

Why SFMANJ Opposes the “Safe Playing Fields Act”

By Don Savard, CSFM, CGM

I was not expecting the phone call on Monday, January 31. Nancy Sadlon, Executive Director, New Jersey Green Industry Council (NJGIC) called me at work with news that New Jersey State Senate Bill S.2610, the so-called “Safe Playing Fields Act”, was moving through committee. This Bill, if enacted into law would ban the use of lawn care pesticides on sports fields in New Jersey, unless the application can be justified as an emergency response to an immediate threat to human health. Because we are an organization of sports field managers and would be directly affected by the outcome should this Bill pass into law, Ms. Sadlon requested the help of Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey (SFMANJ).

Over the past 5 years, SFMANJ has tried to remain apolitical. Our mission is and has always been enhancing the professionalism of athletic field managers. Our primary goals include improving safety, playability, and appearance of athletic fields at all levels. Since our inception in 2000, SFMANJ members have had the opportunity to achieve these goals through seminars, field days, publications, and networking with those in the sports turf industry. After some thought and discussion, the SFMANJ Board of Directors agreed to lend our support to NJGIC in opposing this Bill. I would like to share with you our reasons.

Safety - The goal of sports field management is to provide a safe and playable surface. Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey has always been an advocate of good cultural management and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) on sports fields. We also acknowledge that the careful, restrained use of pesticides can be a component of a site-specific sports field management plan. Sports fields are subjected to many stresses—some made by people, some are caused by nature. Sports field managers are expected (by the people we serve) to do everything possible to keep sports fields safe and playable. In order to meet these expectations, we need all of the tools available to get the job done – including conventional pesticide products. If the Safe Playing Fields Act is enacted, some of our most effective tools will be taken away.

New Jersey School IPM Law - New Jersey already has in-place a School IPM Law. Should the use of a non-low impact pesticide become necessary, there is a well-defined protocol that must be followed before such a product can be used. The current Law requires having an IPM coordinator and IPM plan, NJ DEP Category 13 pesticide licensing, 72 hour notification, preferential use of low impact pesticides, 7-hour reentry period, and stringent record keeping. Applying a traditional pesticide in accordance with the NJ School IPM Law provides transparency

through its notification requirements and added security against potential exposure through a mandatory reentry period. The Safe Playing Fields Act, if enacted would virtually eliminate traditional pesticide use; applications that are already subject to a well-defined, well-regulated protocol in Schools.

Economic Realities - A carefully planned, conventional pesticide application, in full-compliance with US EPA registered pesticide label requirements and NJ School IPM rules can provide maximum cost benefits. The application of conventional pesticide can be used to solve turf health problems quickly and effectively. Taking no action or using less-effective products may result in field loss, subsequent costly field replacement and a substantial loss of field space for use by children and parents. If we do not protect sports field surfaces from natural or manmade damage, we risk having to spend considerable taxpayer money to replace or repair sports field damage caused by pests. Currently, many New Jersey Schools and municipalities are cutting expenses by eliminating positions and programs. This is not the time to remove tools from the toolbox.

The NJGIC is a very effective watchdog group looking out for the interests of New Jersey’s Green Industry. As previously mentioned, NJGIC alerted SFMANJ to this bill and has asked for comments and participation from our Association. In contrast, those organizations supporting and lobbying for the passage of this Bill have not reached-out to SFMANJ for our opinion on this Bill; our Association being the leading Industry trade organization representing sports field managers in New Jersey. Without the efforts of NJGIC, issues affecting our Industry (and our livelihoods) could go forward in Trenton with upsetting results. The NJGIC has asked for our support, and SFMANJ has stepped-up. Several of our members have attended meetings with legislators, written letters and testified at hearings. At the March 2, 2011 SFMANJ Board of Directors meeting, our Board agreed unanimously to make a \$1,000 contribution to NJGIC with the stipulation that the contribution be used to help offset operating expenses.

In the end, our endeavor is to continue to create the safest playing conditions for all of New Jersey’s sports field users.

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