OCCA Pesticide Position Statement

The Otsego County Conservation Association opposes the widespread use of pesticides due to their potential harm to the environment. Improper use of pesticides can result in elevated levels of harmful substances in the environment, which can have a detrimental effect on humans and other life. Run-off to streams and lakes and infiltration to groundwater can contaminate drinking water supplies and impact fish populations and aquatic ecosystems. OCCA supports limited pesticide use guided by the principles of integrated pest management (IPM). Our ideal is that homeowners, businesses and farmers would utilize alternate methods of control in place of pesticides whenever practical.

Pesticides are substances – whether synthetic or naturally occurring – which prevent, destroy, repel or mitigate pest plants, animals, and fungi, and include insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and various other substances used to control pests. While pesticides play an important role in agriculture and human health, careless or improper use of pesticides can have serious and far-reaching impacts on the environment. As such, OCCA believes pesticides should always be chosen as a last resort. Pesticide use should be with the strictest adherence to application guidelines in order to minimize the amount of chemicals used as well as the risk of damage to non-target species. OCCA urges applicators to select pesticides that are effective against the target species, unlikely to move offsite through the air or water, non-toxic to people and other organisms, and not persistent in the environment.

Ultimately OCCA advocates a pest management policy which is free of pesticides whenever possible. With this goal in mind, we will continue to work to educate the public to encourage elimination of the use of pesticides and to recommend alternative control strategies that are proven to be safe, effective and environmentally friendly.

OCCA understands that determining the right course of action in pest management is a complex undertaking. Pesticide use should not be taken lightly, nor should choices be made based solely on categories such as organic vs. inorganic or natural vs. synthetic, as these classifications do not accurately reflect the harm these compounds can do. Instead, individuals and communities

should evaluate their use of pesticides based on multiple factors including cost, efficiency, and potential environmental impact, framed within an integrated pest management strategy. Knowing when to begin management action is the key to catching an infestation before successful control becomes unfeasible. As with medicine, pesticides must be used judiciously to be safe and effective.

OCCA recognizes that pesticides are used by farmers to increase productivity and by other land owners to control weeds and pests. Where this use occurs, OCCA supports the following measures to reduce or eliminate the impact to the environment:

- Employ the principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a system that relies on a combination of common-sense practices to prevent and control pests (e.g., weeds, diseases, insects) in which monitoring is utilized to identify pests, damage thresholds are considered, all possible management options are evaluated, and selected control(s) are implemented. See http://www.epa.gov/opp00001/factsheets/ipm.htm for details on IPM.
- Non-chemical control measures should focus on practices such as the introduction of natural pest enemies (e.g., parasites and predators), hand removing pests, improving air movement, soil aerification techniques, and mechanical traps.
- Chemical control strategies should be employed only when other strategies have been determined inadequate. When chemical products are determined necessary, the following practices should be utilized:
    - Always read and follow label directions when using any chemical products.
    - Strive to treat problems at the proper time and under the proper conditions to maximize effectiveness with minimal environmental impact. Use spot treatments wherever possible rather than broadcast treatments.
    - Store and handle all pest control products in a manner that minimizes human/animal exposure and/or potential for point or non-point source pollution. Employ proper chemical storage practices and use suitable personal protective equipment and handling techniques.
    - Use products and practices that reduce the potential for contamination of ground and surface water.
    - Residential and commercial facilities should inform the public about chemical applications. Common methods include temporary signs or neighbor notification.
    - Dispose of pesticides and herbicides in a responsible way. *These substances should not go out with household garbage.* Instead, they should be brought to Otsego County's annual Household Hazardous Waste Day collection, which occurs each September. Check with OCCA or the Otsego County Solid Waste Department for dates.

OCCA recognizes that pesticides are used by homeowners and residential lawn care professionals to control weeds and pests. Where this use occurs, OCCA supports the following measures (from Grassroots Environmental Education, www.grassrootsinfo.org) to reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and thereby the impact to the environment:

- Feed the soil – One of the best things you can do for your soil is to rake one-half inch of compost into your lawn each spring and fall. To speed up this soil building process you

may want to add microbial inoculants. These "good" bacteria and fungi support beneficial microbes that are essential to growing healthy turf. A soil test may identify the need for other soil amendments, such as rock dust or lime. Contact Cornell Soil Health Lab for information (http://soilhealth.cals.cornell.edu/extension/test.htm)

- Feed the grass – Leave grass clippings on the lawn. They provide nitrogen and reduce the amount of fertilizer needed by about one half. If you want to give your lawn an extra boost in the spring, choose a low nitrogen water insoluble fertilizer with a nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium (NPK) ratio of approximately 3-1-2.
- Re-seed annually – A thick turf is one of the best ways to control weeds. Seed in late summer or early fall with a mixture of indigenous grasses. Core or slice aeration of the soil before seeding will improve germination and alleviate compaction.
- Mow high – Cut grass at 3 to 3-1/2 inches, allowing it to shade its roots, conserve moisture and keep out weeds. High mowing is a better method for controlling crabgrass than herbicides. Keep blades sharp so they do not tear the grass, making it vulnerable to disease. Rotate mowing patterns.
- Water less, but longer – Once-a-week watering in the early morning for several hours is the best method. Take into consideration the rainfall and type of soil you have. Sandy soil needs more water than clay-based soil.
- Control those weeds – If you really don't like dandelions, dig them out! But you can also use a corn-gluten product that prevents weed seeds from germinating. It must be applied to established (not newly seeded) lawns early in the spring for several years to control problem areas. For spot weed control on driveways and walkways, use a vinegar or vinegar combination product.
- Control pests without chemicals – Common pests (grubs, sod webworms, chinch bugs) can be controlled with applications of beneficial nematodes. Milky spore powder is another effective control for Japanese beetle grubs. Fungal diseases can be treated with several light applications of compost or liquid compost "tea." Beneficial organisms in healthy soil will out-compete unwanted pests.

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