Non Toxic School Landscaping Toolkit

STEP 1: Fact Finding - Research Current Practices

The first step is to find out what (if any!) pesticides your school is using. It is possible that your school is already using nontoxic landscape methods (most in Sonoma County already do, including ALL Santa Rosa City Schools.) Start by talking to your school administration and/or maintenance team. Ask them to show you the reports they are required to provide monthly to the Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner's Office on all pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, etc.) used on campus. Schools are also required to have in place an Integrated Pest Management Plan so ask to see that as well. Note that many smaller school districts in Sonoma County are not in compliance with this California Department of Pesticide Regulation rule so don't be surprised if your school isn't. Suggested email text for a records request is provided below. This will give you data on what toxins are being used and how much. Also note that many schools contract out their landscape services and pest control so it's important to get pesticide use records from both the school maintenance team and any contracted landscape or pest control companies.

In summary:

- Who to ask: Public works/parks department director or school superintendent.
- How to ask: Email is usually most efficient.
- Does it cost money? No, unless the records require photocopying, which is almost never the case.
- Sample records request:

*Dear [**Director/Superintendent**],*

*Under the California Public Records Act §6250 et seq., I am requesting copies of public records of applications of all synthetic herbicides by the [**City/School District**] from [**Dates, ask for 3 years back**]. Include herbicide name, specific street address and amounts applied by your employees and contractors.*

I request the data be sent to me in .txt, .csv or .xls formats. If these format are not available, I request the records be scanned and emailed to us in .pdf format. I am also requesting a copy of your Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan.

I request a fee waiver in that the disclosure of the requested records is in the public interest. I request the records as part of a study on pesticide use in Sonoma County. I have no commercial interest in the requested information.

I would request a prompt response to this request. If you expect a significant delay in responding to or in fulfilling this request, please contact me with information about when I might expect copies of the requested records.

STEP 2: Analyze the data

Determine what their current practices are around herbicide use.

- What pesticide did they use?
- How much and how often (was it a one time application because of an emergency or is it regular use?)
- Where are the places they most use pesticides (lawn, landscaping, sidewalk cracks, insecticides around buildings?)
- Do they use bilingual signs to notify when spraying is conducted? Signage before and after all pesticide use is required by law.
- Do they do the spraying in-house, hire a contractor, or both?
- Are any organic OMRI certified pesticides used? Many schools have switched to using safer pesticides, check to make sure they are actually certified organic/OMRI. If they are not, they could have dangerous ingredients.

STEP 3: Dig into their Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM)

Every city and school is required by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation to have an Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM) that should prioritize non-chemical weed management methods and limit the use of synthetic pesticides to last resort situations. Department staff should be able to provide you with their IPM.

- What is a pesticide: http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/dept/factshts/what2.pdf
- What is an IPM?
    - A legally binding document that should be based on prevention, monitoring, and control of pests and weeds and offers the opportunity to ***eliminate the use of pesticides***.
    - Core components:
        - Monitoring, Record-Keeping, Action Levels, Prevention. Tactics Criteria, Evaluation
- Do they have an IPM? Is it posted publicly?
- What pesticides are used?
    - Contact Sonoma SASS for toxicity information on products. You can also use these pesticide toxicity databases to learn about the health and environmental impacts of each chemical or product:
        - https://www.beyondpesticides.org/resources/pesticide-gateway
        - http://www.pesticideinfo.org/Search_Products.jsp

STEP 4: Legal Compliance

Pre-school and public k-12 schools need to be compliance with the Healthy Schools Act. This means that schools must notify families at the beginning of the school year about any pesticides that might be used on campus by school staff or by pest control contractors. Schools also need to provide a mechanism to allow parents to opt in to receive notifications before pesticides are applied on campus (even if spraying occurs over breaks and weekends). All school personnel (teachers, maintenance staff, etc.) must take training from the California Department of Pesticide Regulation if they use any pesticides on campus registered by the EPA. Parents/community members are allowed to request pesticide use reports from a school District that include all pesticides used by school staff and by pest control contractors.

> CA Department of Pesticide Regulation: California School & Child Care Integrated Pest Management (IPM) main website: http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/
>
> FAQs (page 7): http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/school_ipm_law/hsa_faq.pdf

Farms and other operations using pesticides within ¼ miles of a school site Monday through Friday from 6:00am to 6:00 pm must notify the school pursuant to 3 CCR 6692. This is important as over 100 schools within Sonoma County are located within ¼ miles of a farm or operation that sprays pesticides. If your school is in an agricultural setting, request to see any spray notifications from nearby farmers and request that the school proactively alert families if pesticide use will be occurring during school hours.

STEP 5: Compile your data & compose your message

Now that you have gathered information on your city or school's (1) current use of pesticides, (2) IPM status, and (3) legal compliance, you are ready to spread the word! The next step is to organize your findings and gather case studies to show examples of where schools have already eliminated pesticides successfully. If you run into any barriers or dead ends, Sonoma SASS can provide expert technical and political assistance.

- Sample successful IPM plans:
    - Beyond Pesticides School template
    - Healthy Schools Act template
    - Irvine Unified IPM Procedures
    - Sample City ordinance
    - Petaluma City Schools IPM policy
    - Santa Rosa City Schools Sustainability Plan

- Beyond Pesticides Tools for Change
- Sample Preferred Product List: Non Toxic Neighborhoods 2018 Preferred Product List
- Non-chemical alternative methods resources:
  - https://www.beyondpesticides.org/
  - http://www.conservationaction.org/news/toxicfree/
  - https://farmersfootprint.us/ntn/NonToxicNeighborhoods-Playbook.pdf

STEP 6: Now...you're ready to organize!

If after talking with your school and learning all the facts you believe updated pesticide use policies are in order, it's time to organize. Spreading the word and building supportive momentum may be critical to build political will for change. You need your school administration and school board to recognize how important this issue is to the school community. Sonoma SASS is here to support this grassroots movement and help you plug into the statewide community working on this important issue! Here are the areas to start:

Meet with School Board members – Meet with elected officials, the health department and other agencies that influence your goal, encouraging their support. Sonoma SASS can help you identify environmentally-minded allies to work with.

Clear Ask to City and School District Officials: Be direct with your School Board that they need to implement an IPM plan that does not allow the use of synthetic pesticides.. They may need to agendize the issue to discuss before a vote, if they do, make a plan to engage the community and turn out as many concerned constituents as possible.

Present your findings to your Parent Teacher Association: California State PTA recommends that all PTAs take an active role in eliminating pesticide use at schools. Present your non toxic vision to your PTA and get their support.

Make certain that Non Toxic School issues are at the forefront of community dialogue: In election time, ask School Board candidates running for office or reelection if they support eliminating synthetic pesticides from your school district. You can publish this information with their answers in local newspapers or by sending emails to your neighbors, helping educate them on the positions of these candidates.

Be a role model – Get synthetic pesticides out of your yard and help encourage others to do the same.

Get creative with spreading the word – Inform the community by tabling at events, starting letter writing teams, tell your local newspapers, TV and Radio stations, local magazines, etc. Sonoma SASS can help you gather signatures for a petition, give educational presentations, create and distribute fact sheets.

Questions?

Feel free to reach out to Sonoma SASS to learn more about this campaign and how you can help be part of this state-wide movement!

SonomaSASS@conservationaction.net

www.SonomaSASS.org

Thank you!