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# Non Toxic Strategy Guide

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A Guide To Successfully Getting Toxic  
Pesticides Out Of Your Community



Non Toxic   
Communities

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# Who We Are

## *About Non Toxic Communities*

[www.nontoxiccommunities.com](http://www.nontoxiccommunities.com)

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*We are your friends and neighbors who care about protecting public health and the environment from the effects of toxic pesticide use. We advocate for organic lawn and land care in our neighborhoods, parks and schools.*

*We believe that all communities have the right to be healthy. This means clean air, clean water and an environment free from toxic chemicals. We want to help citizens to advocate for public health where they live.*

*We created this strategy guide to assist you to begin a successful grassroots campaign. We hope that our experience can help and inspire you to create your own non toxic community.*

*Email us: [info@nontoxiccommunities.com](mailto:info@nontoxiccommunities.com)*

## Chapter One

# Getting Started

## *Your First Steps*

### *Positive Attitude*

It is imperative to know from the start that you should be polite, rational, and have a win-win attitude. You are asking for a switch due to the large body of scientific studies on pesticide harm, and rise in related diseases. The persons whom you are approaching and asking to change policies may not have all of this knowledge. Education is key. Delivering it with a kind, yet concerned attitude will go a long way to help you through the process.

### *Gather Information*

Contact your HOA, city, school district or parks department and ask for a list of pesticides\* being used. Ask for Material Safety Data (MSDS) and product labels as well as records of what is used where and when. Not all of this information will always be available, so gather what you can. Some states, such as California, require a pesticide usage report to be filed with the city or school monthly. Often you can submit a records request for municipalities by going to the city website online to the public records request section.

### *Make Local Connections*

Contact us at Non Toxic Communities and we will try to connect you to others who may have contacted us from your area. A good place to look for others in your locale is in our Facebook group, '[How To Create A Non Toxic Community](#)'. That's where we met each other!

### *Start A Non Toxic Group*

Using the information you have gathered about local pesticide use, share it with others in your community and ask if they'd like to help change things. Connect with parents at your school, PTA, sports teams, churches or other community groups.

The local pediatric cancer community is another good place to find like minded individuals, but of course remember that not all may be emotionally ready to jump into a project. Remember to be empathetic and offer them different ways in which they can help such as writing a letter or sharing their personal experience by speaking at a meeting.

*\*Terminology: In this guide we refer to 'pesticides' which includes herbicides (weedkillers), fungicides, insecticides, rodenticides, and some combination fertilizer and seed products. All of these have to be registered with the EPA and they are all registered as pesticides.*

## Chapter Two

# Organizing Your Group

## *Building A Strong Non Toxic Team*

### *Diversify Your Group*

Successful groups have reported that they've found decision makers respond more favorably to their male team members as the landscaping business is typically male dominated. Look for people with with different skill sets and backgrounds so that you can pool your resources and more effectively reach decision makers.

### *Set Your Goals*

Think about what you wish to accomplish and create a clear mission statement for your group. It need not be long, just a sentence or two will suffice.

### *Develop An Identity*

Once you have a group formed and a mission statement it's time to create a social media presence. Make a logo for your group or find a pretty picture to use - Creative Commons is a good resource for this. If you like we can make one for you, just send us an email with your group name. You can create a blog, website, group or page on Facebook, as well as accounts on Instagram, Twitter, or Pinterest. Use the pages to educate, activate supporters and to promote a petition.



## Chapter Three

# Online Petitions

## *A Key Part Of Your Strategy*

### *How To Create An Online Petition*

A petition will make it easier for people to take action on this issue. Be sure to use a non-partisan platform, as you do not want to alienate supporters or decision makers from your cause. Many groups have used Change.org successfully. They are easy to use and make the petition look professional. The closed petition by Non Toxic Dover may be used as an example. [See here](#). Feel free to use the wording and adapt it to your own petition.

The site will automatically send an email to the decision makers you choose. You will also be able to send updates to your supporters (the people who have signed) which is extremely convenient. For more tips, see the helpful guide from Change.org [here](#).

### *Promote Your Petition*

Your next step is to share your petition on social media. You can use Facebook ads to promote your petition at a reasonable cost. You are able to set your own budget, and even customize the geographic location you wish to reach. This will help you to reach more people and target your desired demographic by adding terms from the list of interests. No one will see these terms so use whatever you think will help reach the right people. Use what you like, and keep track of what works best. Some suggested terms:

- *Names of local schools and colleges, youth sports organizations, i.e. soccer, Little League*
- *Parenting, Breastfeeding, Pregnancy*
- *Bee Keepers, National Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Surfrider, Clean Water, etc.*
- *Grandparents, Senior Care, Alzheimers*
- *Names of cancer and autism charities*
- *GMO free, Whole Foods, Organic, Organic Gardening, etc.*
- *Holistic, Healthy, Natural Living, Sustainability, Non Toxic, etc.*

## Chapter Four

# Building Credibility

## *How To Be Taken Seriously*

### *Use Facts And Evidence*

In order to be successful in educating policymakers on specific issues you will need to be appropriately persuasive. Deliver your message in a manner that is based on facts and evidence, and use a calm tone. Getting overly emotional or angry will not achieve desired results. Always stay politically neutral, while at the same time recognizing that the decision makers may have party affiliations and it may be appropriate to tailor what you say accordingly.

Stay focused on your mission. Bringing up other topics like genetic engineering, agriculture, water fluoridation, etc. when addressing decision makers or the public on behalf of your group will distract from your purpose, especially if controversial, and can confuse or lose your audience. Don't dilute your message.

### *Credible Research*

There is plenty of good quality scientific evidence demonstrating pesticide harm. *Referring to questionable sources will hurt your efforts.* Only use credible scientific and mainstream news sources. Blogs or other sources cannot be relied upon, and even if the idea or subject is correct, may contain errors and can be *perceived* as not being credible. For example, Roundup and its active ingredient glyphosate is the subject of lots of headlines, many of which are exaggerations or misrepresentations. Be sure to steer clear of these.

An example of a credible citation regarding glyphosate based herbicides: *Concerns over use of glyphosate-based herbicides and risks associated with exposures; a consensus statement.* We have many more on our website.

Google Scholar is an easy way to search topics for published studies, as is Pub Med. You can also find much good information at the websites for Environmental Health News, The Endocrine Disruption Exchange (TEDX), Beyond Pesticides, and Pesticide Action Network (PAN), just to name a few.

## Chapter Five

# Getting Ready To Meet With Decision Makers

## *Be Prepared*

### *Find Scientific Advisors*

Now that your group has been formed, and petition and social media pages launched, you will need to find local scientists and medical professionals to help advise you. You will need someone willing to participate in meetings and write letters to decision makers on your behalf.

You can start by searching online with names of local higher learning institutions. Combine them with keywords like “pesticides” “cancer” “environmental health risks” and “research”. Take a look at the research that comes up. Try contacting the authors to see if they are available to participate in your meetings with decision makers. Look for your local chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility or similar advocacy groups.

If you can find a local doctor, nurse, professor or scientist who will accompany you to the meetings to answer questions, that would be best. Many times retired scientists will be eager to do so. Try to find specialists in endocrinology if possible.

### *Contact The Decision Makers*

Email your decision makers, identify yourself, what your goal is and ask for a meeting. Be polite, but firm. For example, ask the decision makers what needs to be done to create a policy, rather than asking if they will make one. Keep an electronic list of contacts and emails that you can easily share with your group/team so they can also reach out to decision makers.

### *Prepare For Meetings*

Eventually, your team will need to make a presentation at a city council event or meet with decision makers from your schools or your HOA. Prepare packets, folders or binders of printed materials and try to include some published research. You can find this information on our website. Beyond Pesticides can provide educational materials (brochures, fact sheets, etc.) that you can include in the binder as well. A simple, easy to digest handout called



“Health Effects of 40 Commonly Used Lawn Pesticides” makes for a great first document to share with decision makers.

For a school district, you may be meeting with board members, the superintendent or similar. For the city, it is best to try to meet with individual council members prior to meeting with a very large group at a regular council meeting. If you are not able to meet with the city council members beforehand don't worry. You can also start by attending a city council meeting and speaking in the public comments portion of the meeting generally in the beginning before they start with scheduled agenda items. Should you ever need topics for discussion please let us know and we can share what has worked for us. Always bring enough copies of studies or “Health Effects of 30...” document to share with all the council or board members at the meeting. At some point you will want to get on the agenda after you have met to have them vote to switch to a less toxic policy. We can assist you with some policy samples that you can suggest so it makes it easier for them. Beyond Pesticides also has access to many policies currently in use in various municipalities and they can share that information with you as well.

### *Do Your Homework*

Research your town or district's leaders on LinkedIn and Google. Familiarize yourself with their opinions and how they operate. This can help you find topics to speak about or avoid, or to find an ally on the boards and councils. Having inside support is key to your success. You only need one person supporting you from the inside to get the ball rolling!

An important part of strategy is leverage. For instance, one group used the fact that the PTA presidents persuaded the school district to drop toxic pesticides to motivate the city to do so as well. Another group used the city's 'sustainable initiative' from their website to point out where they were falling short on implementation of its principles.

### *Contact The Press*

It is good to invite press to your meetings when you are on the agenda and have a group speaking to the decision makers. A short, simple press release with the pertinent details of why you are there, and a link to credible research is good to include as well as the spelling of the names of the speakers with your group and contact numbers so they can call you with questions. Often the reporters get the story and details wrong and this helps keep things straight and so do what you can to make sure that the article they write is on target. Prepare this ahead of time, so that it will be ready when needed. It's good to note that press releases with photographs tend to get more attention. If you can include a photo of your group this would be helpful.

## Chapter Six

# Find Your Message

## *Deciding What Your Focus Will Be*

### *Develop A Core Message*

Decide on a primary focus for your group. For example, if you are trying to stop spraying at your local schools, children's health should be at the center of your message. Different areas to focus on include:

- *Human health effects of pesticides*
- *Children and their unique vulnerability during critical periods of development*
- *Effects on the elderly or chronically ill*
- *Environmental effects like drift and runoff into bodies of water, chemicals can persist*
- *Harm to wildlife, i.e. pollinators or to pets*

Focusing on the health of children is very effective, as it is natural to want to protect the young. If the community is older and established, focus on dementia, Alzheimers and cancer that has also been linked to pesticide exposure.

### *Keep It Simple*

Try to keep your message clear and concise. Use examples your audience can relate to. Using analogies can be helpful, also visual aids like photos, charts, and graphs can help reinforce your message and make it memorable.

### *Adapt The Message*

You will want to tailor your message to fit your audience. Know who you will be talking to and research them if possible. Think about the values they may hold and what is relevant to them. Example issues to target:

- *Uniquely vulnerable populations, like children, elderly, and pets.*
- *Economic impacts of pesticides, like lower IQ, cancer, and diseases linked to EDCs*
- *Fiscal benefits, like the long term savings of a natural systems approach to turf*
- *Success stories of places that have made the switch to organic land care*
- *Appeal to tourists, families, and homebuyers who value clean air and water*

## Chapter Seven

# Meeting Strategy

## *Tips For Meetings With Decision Makers*

### *Tell Them What Motivates You*

You are a volunteer, not a professional lobbyist. They will want to understand why you are meeting with them, and your personal story is important for them to hear. Speak from your heart about your own background and why this is important for the community. Personal stories can help others relate and will be memorable.

### *Present Your Petition*

You should have already started a petition that directed every signature to email representatives so they know there is a large base of support surrounding your team. Once a critical mass is achieved, then it is time to schedule your visit. When you go in, they will be more apt to listen to you because it's not just a few people who are watching what they are doing. Bring a copy of the petition and all of the signatures with you. Those are voters, and they are important.

### *Make Your Case*

We cannot remove toxic pesticides without an alternative solution. Bring examples of other municipalities who have changed over successfully, and information about organic land care standards. The hardest part for the maintenance people or contractors to handle is the changeover. Understand that city officials know next to nothing about landscaping practices, and staff will likely come back to them with the reasons they *cannot* change to organic methods.

The maintenance department or landscaping contractors have been influenced for years by the chemical industry representatives, who have told them that the products they are using are “perfectly safe” and that there are no other viable or cost effective measures that can be employed. You will need to inform them that other cities and school districts have switched over successfully and that costs were kept in control. If you have any budget for buying chemicals, chances are you can fund a system based on organic practices for about the same. We can help with supplying the studies and information proving so, and Beyond Pesticides can arrange a training program that can get your department started with a pilot program.

# Additional Resources

## Contact Information

*Beyond Pesticides*

*(202) 543-5450*

*[info@beyondpesticides.org](mailto:info@beyondpesticides.org)*

*[www.beyondpesticides.org](http://www.beyondpesticides.org)*

*Osborne Organics*

*[www.osborneorganics.com](http://www.osborneorganics.com)*

*Organic Land Care Project*

*[www.olcproject.com](http://www.olcproject.com)*

*Re:wild Your Campus*

*[www.rewildyourcampus.org](http://www.rewildyourcampus.org)*

*Grassroots Environmental Education*

*[www.grassrootsinfo.org](http://www.grassrootsinfo.org)*

*Pesticide Action Network North America*

*[www.panna.org](http://www.panna.org)*

*NOFA Organic Land Care Program*

*[www.nofa.organiclandcare.net](http://www.nofa.organiclandcare.net)*

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# Local Action Plan

## Five Simple Steps

### Asking the right questions up front saves time

Creating an action plan for your town, city, school district, or HOA will be critical to getting started and staying on track. Taking the time to answer these simple questions will guide your process and lead to your success. Let's get started!

1

#### WHAT?

Find out what pesticides & fertilizers are being used

It's your right to know: Ask for all labels of pesticide and fertilizer products being used. Sometimes this will require making a public records request.

2

#### WHO?

Find out who is applying them

Inquire to find out if staff are applying products, or outside vendors. It may be a combination of both.

3

#### WHERE?

Find out where they are being applied

Ask for a list of all the areas being treated. This may include parks, playgrounds, rights-of-way and more. Use this information to inform residents.

# Next Steps

## Identify the people involved and their roles

Knowing who to approach to make changes, and who are your allies is an important part of a successful campaign. Begin by asking 6 key questions.

4

### WHO?

Who do you need to communicate with?

- Who are the decision makers?
- Who oversees the landscaping work?
- Who is friendly to your cause?

5

### WHAT?

What do you need to communicate?

- Organic land care as the solution
- Need for policy change
- Need for pilot program

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[www.nontoxiccommunities.com](http://www.nontoxiccommunities.com)

# Public Records Inquiry Checklist

## Questions to Ask - Documents You'll Need

When making a public records request it is important to specify exactly the information you are looking for. This checklist of suggested questions makes it easier to narrow down your request and get the details you need to inform the public about pesticide use in your city, and help find appropriate organic solutions.

- ✓ What pesticides\* are being used? Ask for all product labels and/or MSDS.\*\*
- ✓ Weed Control: Crabgrass, broadleaf weeds etc.
- ✓ Insect Control: Grubs etc.
- ✓ Vector Control: Mosquitos, rats, mice, pigeons, roaches, miscellaneous other vermin
- ✓ Who applies the pesticides? City staff? Outside contractors? Both?
- ✓ Fertilizer products: Ask for labels and/or MSDS.
- ✓ Fertilizing schedule
- ✓ Is a fertigation system used?
- ✓ Are mulch or compost being used, if so when (seasonally), how often & what products?
- ✓ How often is aeration being done? What kind? Core, deep tine, etc.
- ✓ Who does the mowing? What are the mowing heights?
- ✓ Where are the pesticides and fertilizers being used?

Some of this information can be obtained by speaking to a department head, but likely a formal records request will need to be made for specific documentation.

We hope this helps you get a better picture of the current landscaping and pest control practices in your community so you can now begin to facilitate the switch to fully organic methods.

\*Pesticides includes herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, etc.    \*\* MSDS - material safety data sheet

# Next Steps

## Useful Tips to Inform the Public

- ✓ Share the information you requested with the public.
- ✓ Use social media, and and other forms of communication like flyers, blogs, or websites.
- ✓ If you have created a petition, share a list of the products being used there.
- ✓ Share information about how pesticides harm people, pets and the environment.
- ✓ Try not to focus on one chemical.
- ✓ Promote information about Organic Land Care Standards.
- ✓ Visit the Organic Land Care Project for information about organic solutions.
- ✓ Try to balance the information shared about harms with solutions.
- ✓ Stick to credible sources - find suggestions here on our website.
- ✓ Focus your message on solutions, asking for what you want, instead of “banning.”
- ✓ Be straightforward. Ask people, “Will you help me stop this?”
- ✓ Get more eyes on the issue with a press release or letter to the editor.
- ✓ Stay focused, pace yourself, and have fun meeting new people and making change!

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