

# *The Boston Banner*

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## **Grassroots effort can't curtail pesticides in park**

*by Yawu Miller*

In good weather, Guillermo Sanchez and his daughters visit the Southwest Corridor park at least three times a week.

No one from the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation has told him what types of pesticides are being used on the grass in the park, or when they are applied. The small yellow flags placed on the grass after applications of pesticides give no clue as to the type or toxicity of the chemicals used.

"Once I saw flags as I was driving by, but I didn't know what the flags were for," Sanchez said.

Although state law requires that the DCR — or any agency, business, organization or individual — use flyers and newspaper advertisements to notify park goers and abutters of any pesticide application, members of the Jamaica Plain-based Neighborhood Pesticide Action Committee say the agency has never complied with that law.

"The reason there's a law is so that people can take precautions," said Margaret Connors, who heads the organization. "That's not happening."

While the DCR has not made public information about the types of pesticides used on the grass in the park — which stretches from Forest Hills to the Copley Square area — Connors notes that several of the pesticides the agency uses have been banned by the European Union.

None of the DCR pesticides have been banned in the United States, but Connors says they are not safe for children.

"The safety of pesticides is gauged on the effects they have on a 155-pound person," Connors said. "What are their effects on a 50-pound child?"

According to research published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, pesticides can negatively affect brain development in fetuses and



Robbie and Chris Rivas enjoy warm weather in the Southwest Corridor Park opposite the Stonybrook Orange Line station. The state's Conservation and Recreation uses pesticide in the park, despite opposition from local residents.

infants. In other studies, pesticides have been linked to neurological disorders and cancer. Children below the age of four who are exposed to pesticides face higher risks of developing asthma as well.

“There are young children rolling around in the grass,” Connors said. “People have a right to know when pesticides are being applied and what pesticides are being applied.”

For the last three years, the Neighborhood Pesticide Action Coalition has appealed to the DCR to stop using pesticides in the park, citing the high number of children using the park. While the city’s Department of Parks and Recreation has agreed to stop using pesticides in some Jamaica Plain and Roxbury parks, the DCR has been much more difficult to deal with.

According to state Rep. Liz Malia — in whose district much of the park lies — part of the problem is the high turnover at DCR. The agency has seen five commissioners during the last four years. And since last year, the agency has operated without a commissioner.

“There’s nobody minding the store,” Malia said. “That’s was so frustrating. We can’t engage with the people. They just go ahead with business as usual.”

Calls to DCR spokeswoman Corby Kump were not returned.

Neither Malia nor Connors said they have received a written response from anyone at DCR in the last year, despite numerous attempts to correspond.

“I’m not a chemist,” Malia said. “I’m not a biologist. But the way you address problems is to sit down and say you’ll bring your people to the table and we’ll bring ours and we’ll work this out. It just hasn’t happened.”

Connor said the committee organized a letter-writing campaign that sent more than 2,000 letters from local residents to DCR, but still garnered no response.

“Nothing seems to get them to change,” Connors said. “We’re talking one park. We’ve been at this for four years and we’ve not made any progress.”

In the mean time, the periodic appearance of yellow flags may continue to suffice for community notification. That might not be enough, however.

“I’ve seen the flags,” said a teenager named Robbie. “But usually when you see them, you still see people playing on the grass.” □