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## **A growing cry in the Corridor: Curb your pesticides**

*By Shari Rudavsky, Globe Correspondent*

Nicole Linderman once relished her long, leisurely visits to the Southwest Corridor Park with her terrier-husky mix, Merry. But ever since the 40-pound dog fell ill while playing there, Linderman has eyed the park in a different light.

Before her now: not just a green lawn, but the pesticides that lurk beneath it. Linderman has joined a growing movement to persuade the park's managers to stop using chemicals.

The **Neighborhood Pesticide Action** Committee charges that the chemical pesticides that help give the Corridor its bucolic appearance also pose a health risk to children, pets, and adults.

Word has spread among dog owners to keep a tight leash on their pets as soon as the yellow flags that signal a recent pesticide application crop up on the grounds.

Linderman used to let Merry frolic as long as she wanted. But ever since the day the 2-year-old dog became groggy and could not walk for a scary five minutes, Linderman has tried to curtail their visits even though Merry refuses to "do her business" anywhere else.

Linderman has no definitive evidence that chemicals sickened her pet, but she and at least two other dog owners whose animals suffered similar episodes aren't taking any chances.

"I wouldn't take a picnic blanket out there and hang out," Linderman said. "I just go with her and hope she plays hard and fast."

Over the past year, the neighborhood committee has collected more than 1,000 pledge cards from people demanding that the Department of Conservation and Recreation adopt safer alternatives to the chemical pesticides.

State officials say, however, that they do not have concerns about the safety of the products used on the Southwest Corridor Park, which are used in a targeted manner to control weeds and insects.

"These are readily available pesticides that anybody could go to the hardware store and acquire," said Felix Brown, a spokesman for the Department of Conservation and Recreation, which since the demise of the Metropolitan District Commission oversees urban parks like the Southwest Corridor. "These mass-marketed pesticides do tend to be very effective."

According to a study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, cited in the neighborhood committee's materials, the pesticide with the brand name Momentum has been linked to lymphoma in dogs. The committee also quotes studies that have found that Momentum and Merit,

another pesticide used on the corridor, are toxic for birds and marine animals such as lobsters and crabs.

Linking pesticides directly to toxic effects is no easy task, experts concede. But an increasing body of evidence suggests that they're particularly toxic for children and developing fetuses, said Joel Tickner, an assistant research professor in the Department of Work Environment at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell.

"Many pesticides have not been tested for some of these new effects like neurological impairments or cancers," said Tickner, who has no connection to the group of activists. "They're tested for 'does it poison you?' not the long-term impact. Just because you can buy it doesn't mean it's safe."

And the Southwest Corridor is just the first green space in the group's sights.

"We want to see all parks transition to no pesticide use," said Margaret Connors, another member of the neighborhood committee.

Children and pets are particularly susceptible to the ill effects of pesticides, the group argues, citing research done by a University of Southern California doctor who found that children exposed to herbicides and insecticides in the first years of their lives suffer from asthma at two to five times the rate of children who have had no such exposure.

While the full extent of pesticides' harm may not yet be understood, the information out there is damaging enough to argue against their use, said Dick Clapp, a professor at Boston University's Public Health school, who spoke at a recent citizens' group meeting.

"Don't move into a potentially harmful activity if there's an alternative that you can use that's just as effective or almost as effective," Clapp said.

The group has spoken with Allan Morris, the superintendent of the park, and the Parkland Management Advisory Committee, the Corridor's citizen oversight group, trying to persuade them to abandon use of chemicals.

In the next month or so, the oversight group will issue an advisory report on pesticide use on the Corridor.

"This is not an easy decision, and we take what is done very, very seriously because it is the health of the Corridor," said group president Frank Jordan. "Some of the factors which we have to balance are, is the use of chemistry going to be positive or negative."

Pesticide-free management is feasible, the activists say, pointing to the Arnold Arboretum as a local park that maintains an enticing green space without resorting to chemicals. But comparisons to the arboretum may not be valid, said Jordan. Unlike the arboretum, which is an ecosystem with trees, the Corridor is mostly grass and is more vulnerable to weeds, Jordan said.

"Thirty-five of the 60 acres are lawn. You stretch that and you start to get crabgrass," he said. "If we don't kill the weeds, how do you get rid of them?"

Still, said Virginia Pratt, a member of the citizens' group, they are less worried about how the park looks than about its effects on pets and people.

"We're willing to accept a park that's got maybe not the perfect lawn, but one that we can have our kids, our dogs, roll around on," she said. □