

The Boston People's Voice

Vol. 5, Issue 30 | September 13 to 26, 2002

Group protest to halt spraying of hazardous chemicals in Southwest Corridor Park

A group of concerned Boston residents, some with pets in tow, gathered in front of the Metropolitan District Commission office building today to personally present 1,000 signed postcards to MDC Commissioner David Balfour. The cards call on Balfour to bring an end to the MDC's practice of using toxic pesticides and sewage sludge to maintain the Southwest Corridor Park, a 52-acre tract of land extending from Back Bay through Roxbury to Forest Hills in Jamaica Plain. The park is the site of numerous neighborhood festivals and is used by thousands of area residents for picnicking, recreation, biking, and dog walking.

The Neighborhood Pesticide Action Committee (NPAC), a group of volunteers based in Jamaica Plain, began a campaign this summer to educate community members about the environmental and health impacts of the SW Corridor pesticides after their own research revealed that four of the chemicals used in the park are classified as highly or moderately toxic by the EPA or have effects on humans and their pets that have not been sufficiently studied. Some of these chemicals are known to increase the incidence of reproductive disorders in humans and learning disabilities in children, while 2,4-D, a major component of one of the pesticides, has been linked to serious eye irritation, cancer, and death in dogs.

Since NPAC began their public information campaign, they have gathered 1,000 postcards from residents and nearly 50 endorsements from local businesses, physicians, and children's organizations urging Commissioner Balfour to replace these hazardous chemicals with nontoxic alternative pest controls. Such alternative controls are already being used in public parks throughout Massachusetts, such as in Marblehead, Newton, and Wellesley. "We need to change public policy and practices in light of new information," said Eleanor LeCain, NPAC's founder. "Now that we know better, we can do better. We can deal with the problems of pests without pesticides."

According to Virginia Pratt, a Jamaica Plain resident and founding member of NPAC, the risks of pesticide exposure for children are particularly worrisome in light of the recently passed Children and Families Pesticide Protection Act. This state law prohibits the use of certain potentially harmful pesticides, including some of those now used on the Corridor, on the grounds of schools, daycare centers, and other buildings that house children. This law does not apply to parks, however, and a survey conducted by NPAC of the areas surrounding the SW Corridor Park has found that 19 schools and daycare centers are located within one or two blocks of the site. "It seems ironic," Pratt said, "that a place where probably more children play than in any other park in JP — not to mention Mission Hill, Roxbury, and

downtown — is teeming with pesticides.” “We want our kids’ parks to be as safe as their schools are required to be,” she added.

The area residents who looked on today as a towering stack of postcards was delivered to Commissioner Balfour are hoping that this outpouring of public concern, as well as the gravity of the health risks involved, will prompt Balfour to schedule a meeting between MDC representatives and members of NPAC to discuss a concrete plan for phasing out dangerous pesticides and implementing nontoxic alternatives. NPAC would like such a meeting to take place by the end of the summer. “Today Boston-area citizens gather to call on David Balfour, the Metropolitan District Commissioner, to do the right thing and implement a safe and effective land use plan for the Southwest Corridor,” said Alyssa Schuren, a spokesperson for the Toxics Action Center, an organization that works on toxics problems throughout New England. “The health of our children, pets, and community depends on it.”