Public Health Benefits of Lawn Care Products

Lawn care products protect our grass, shrubs, gardens, and turf, and deter disease-carrying insects and pests such as ticks, ants, fleas, cockroaches, and mosquitoes, thus resulting in significant human health benefits and reduced risks for millions of Americans.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in its "Health Lawn, Healthy Environment – Caring for Your Lawn in an Environment-Friendly Way" brochure (OPPTS, 6/1992) states:

"Thick grass prevents soil erosion, filters contaminants from rain water, and absorbs many types of airborne pollutants, like dust and soot. Grass is also highly efficient at converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, a process that helps clean the air. Caring for your lawn properly can both enhance its appearance and contribute to its environmental benefits."

Healthy lawns are part of a healthy environment. Proper application and preventive use of EPA-registered home, lawn, and garden products are key for ensuring a health lawn and a healthy environment. The use of these pesticide products help protect the general public's use of parks, ball fields, and recreational areas.

In addition to the benefits EPA discusses above, including soil-erosion and air-cleansing, appropriate pesticide use targets public-health pests, thus preventing or mitigating pests' harm to humans and animals. To name just a few of these pest threats:

- ***Bees***, common in backyards, ball fields, and parks, ***account for between 25 and 50 human deaths every year, as well as 2 million allergic reactions.*** These startling numbers could be significantly reduced by the preventive application of EPA-approved lawn, garden, and turf products for the control of bees, wasps, and other stinging insects and the use of herbicides to reduce clover and dandelions that attract bees.

- ***Fire ants***, common in the Southeast, Southwest, and California, ***sting more than 50% of people who live in ant-prevalent areas.*** The ant stings are painful and itchy, and, more seriously, may result in severe allergic reactions, sometimes fatal. Children, who tend to stumble in ant mounds, and the elderly, who are often unable to defend against an ant attack, are most vulnerable. Again, appropriate use of EPA-registered pesticides can prevent the problems associated with fire ants.

- Mosquitoes carry malaria, encephalitis, yellow fever, dengue fever, West Nile Virus, and other potentially disabling or life-threatening diseases. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, report that ***West Nile Virus has infected 3,775 and killed 216 people in America in 2002*** (as of

12/03/02, according to Agency website). The CDC website lists mosquito-repellant as a primary prevention mechanism.

- Ticks carry Lyme disease, an illness newly-detected in 16,000 US patients each year.

- Flea bites cause discomfort and spread disease among humans and animals. Applying flea products to grass areas around the home enable homeowners to reduce or eliminate fleas, preventing the insects from infesting domestic animals.

- Noxious weeds, grasses, ragweed, and pollens, which are a significant contributor to the onset of asthma and other respiratory ailments and allergic reactions, could be controlled with appropriate pesticide products.

- Termites, which can seriously undermine the structural integrity of buildings, resulting in high damage costs, can be controlled with termiticides. Similarly, white grubs can easily infest and destroy healthy lawns.

- Healthy lawns prevent water runoff, thus protecting streets, streams, ponds, and lakes from flooding. Moreover, reduced runoff prevents the loss of valuable soil nutrients and minerals that are essential to the overall well-being of the outdoor environment.

As indicated above in EPA's brochure, healthy lawns and turf absorb airborne pollutants, improving air quality in both urban and suburban areas. By ensuring plant health and vigor, lawn and garden products enhance the viability of vegetation to carry on important processes such as photosynthesis, the chemical reaction through which life-essential oxygen is released to the environment. Moreover, healthier plants, shrubs, and lawns are better able to absorb car exhaust, carbon dioxide, and other pollutants.

Moreover, health lawns and turf reduce or eliminate wind erosion, play an important role in cooling urban and suburban areas, and significantly reduce "noise pollution" through their absorptive or "cushioning" qualities. Finally, healthy lawns and turf contribute immensely to the overall aesthetic quality of the environment in which people live – an important benefit which cannot be quantified.