



GreenCAPE- Cape Alliance for Pesticide Education

PO Box 631
West Barnstable, MA 02668
(508) 362-5927

Non-Toxic Strategies for a Sustainable Cape Cod

NSTAR SPRAYING HERBICIDES ON CAPE COD!

As part of the 2009-13 Vegetative Management Plan, NSTAR is now applying a mixture of five different herbicides under approximately 150 miles of power lines across Cape Cod. These herbicides (a class of pesticides that kill unwanted plants) are mixed with additional carrier agents, such as petroleum distillates, and are being applied to control tall growing trees and brush in addition to the traditional mechanical cutting methods.

NSTAR has been mandated by the federal government to keep the land under power line easements clear of vegetation. The mandate does NOT say NSTAR has to use chemical herbicides. Previously NSTAR maintained the land under the power easements using mechanical methods like cutting and mowing instead of toxic chemicals.

NSTAR has or intends to spray herbicides on properties adjacent to or in close proximity to homes with private wells, within areas of contribution to public water supplies, and adjacent to bike and walking paths. NSTAR does not own these properties.

Depending on application rates and methods, nearby residents and properties can be exposed to drift from these chemicals and there are many ecological consequences to non-target organisms. Additionally, pesticides tracked into homes by people and pets can be a continual source of exposure in the home. The chemicals and their breakdown products can persist in the soil and enter surface and ground water from which we obtain our drinking water.

NSTAR claims the herbicides have been approved by the federal government but the EPA doesn't approve pesticide products (including herbicides). The EPA pesticide registration process offers no assurance of safety –nor was it ever intended to do so. It is an attempt to balance the adverse impacts of pesticide use against the perceived benefits. Federal regulations prohibit any claim that a pesticide is safe, non-toxic, or harmless, even if used according to the label.

The EPA itself has stated “EPA registration does not mean a pesticide is safe. EPA believes that most pesticides--despite having an EPA registration—HAVE NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY TESTED to determine their effects on people or the environment.”

Investigations show that the herbicides being used by NSTAR enter ground and surface waters. There is evidence that the herbicides and breakdown products are associated with the following potential adverse health effects: cancer, tumors, nerve damage, attention deficit disorders, miscarriages, embryo defects, and disruption of hormonal

systems. We already have a legacy of chemical contamination, including pesticides, as well as high rates of breast cancer on Cape Cod.

Most importantly, the full public health and ecological impacts of this particular chemical mixture are not known and have never been tested. Combining herbicides in a mixture can have synergistic effects resulting in greater toxicity. While there is information on active ingredients and individual products, there is no specific information on the synergistic and additive effects of this chemical mixture to understand the fate and effects across Cape Cod. Therefore, we cannot be assured that human health and the environment is protected.

Safer options that do not have the potential to contaminate our water supplies, include mechanical cutting (with timely pruning of re-growth), hot water weed control, flame weeding, harvesting with a biobaler, or prescribed grazing. The ideal, long-term, preventive approach would employ land management practices that build and maintain native and desirable plants that compete well against weeds naturally.

GreenCAPE recognizes the cumulative effect of the low level use of chemicals throughout our watershed and is working to reduce the use of all pesticides. We agree with earlier Silent Spring Institute recommendations to reduce or eliminate pesticides on a community-wide basis. Rights-of-way are just one area in which we need to reduce pesticide use and support policies and practices that protect our residents and ecosystem.

Support Sustainable Rights-of-Way Management

Call your local officials (Board of Health, Conservation Commission, Selectman) to tell them you object to the application of herbicides on NSTAR rights-of-ways. Tell them to act by signing the petition and formally notifying NSTAR in writing and at the number below.

Call NSTAR and tell their representative that you object to the use of herbicides along Cape rights-of-way and that you would like to see a more long-term, sustainable approach to vegetative management. Ask NSTAR to maintain the power line easements the way they have for many years-selective cutting and mowing.

Jeffrey Luce, NSTAR Electric Community Relations
508-957-4502 or
jeffrey.luce@nstar.com

Comment on NSTAR's FaceBook page on the pesticide use discussion board.

For detailed fact sheet and petition to sign and circulate, see
<http://www.GreenCAPE.org/actions.html>.