

Does Your Dog Really Need a Perfect Lawn?

By Adria Henderson

Spring has finally arrived and, along with its bright green grass and colorful early flowers, comes the constant drone of lawn mowers and the follow-up whine of leaf blowers showering the streets with the toxic residue of lawn care products. It is also the time that our dogs, confined inside for long periods during the icy winter, finally get outside to play and romp in the soft new grass.



If you have applied chemical lawn products or had them applied by a professional company, you will be exposing your dog to a toxic and potentially fatal mix.

An early study, cited in the January 2012 issue of the *Journal Environmental Research*, concluded that exposure to professionally applied lawn products was associated with a significantly higher risk of canine malignant lymphoma (CML). Since that time, many studies have confirmed CML cases to be higher in dogs whose property was treated with lawn products, both herbicides and insecticides.

More recent studies, such as one done by Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, concluded that the use of certain lawn care chemicals, specifically weed killers containing 2,4-D is linked to canine cancers, including lymphoma and bladder cancer. 2,4-D is one of the two active ingredients in Agent Orange, the famously toxic defoliant used during the Vietnam War. The chemical is found in many lawn care products including combination products such as Weed N Feed type formulations, which are banned in Canada and elsewhere.

Effects from the toxic mix of chemicals may create lasting health problems once ingested or absorbed. These long-term health hazards may include nausea, skin inflammation and rashes, eye irritation and the onset of frequent respiratory problems. And, recently a study of canines exposed to herbicides detected such products in dog's urine.

Labels on retail lawn care chemicals often claim that the product is safe for pets when dry, but the chemicals can be reactivated by morning dew. Also, dried chemical dust that remains on the lawn can get trapped in dog's fur and tracked inside, becoming

embedded in carpets, dog beds and upholstered fabrics. This dust can linger for days, risking further exposure to your dog and other pets (and you).

To avoid exposing your dog and other household pets to these poisons, here are some precautions you can take to keep them safe:

-
Precautions

- 1- Keep your dog away from treated areas as much as possible.
- 2- Wipe your dog down before bringing him inside if he has played on a chemically treated lawn.
- 3- Check with your city and town about the chemicals used in public parks and playing fields, and keep your dogs away from those areas.
- 4- Become familiar with the chemical lawn care products used by companies and sold in garden centers.
- 5- Always read the warning labels on garden products BEFORE you purchase them.
- 6- Ask your lawn care company for a list of the lawn care chemicals being planned for use.
- 7- Protect wildlife from these same chemicals. Use of these toxic chemicals can kill off the very wildlife whose job it is to kill the garden pests you are attempting to eliminate.
- 8- Check out the many natural lawn care products at your local garden center.

Bright yellow “caution signs” are placed by lawn care companies advising that chemicals have been applied. At first it is not obvious, but these signs do contain a distinct outline of a dog. Since dogs cannot read, it is up to us to protect our furry family members.

Adria Henderson is a writer, editor and social media marketer with emphasis on conservation and animal welfare. She is a member of Protect Our Pollinators, the Steering Committee of the Newtown Pollinator Pathway, Chair, Newtown Animal Control Advisory Board, Communications Committee of CT Votes for Animals, creator of the FB page, Animals Matter-News and former member of Newtown Conservation Commission and board member of Canine Advocates of Newtown.