

Going Organic in Portland, Maine



Portland Protectors Works to Eliminate Pesticides

A total of 25 towns in Maine already have local pesticide ordinances and others are joining them.

By Kathy Litchfield

Portland, ME –

A group of concerned citizens, founded by two moms fed up with their children's and pets' pesticide exposure, is encouraging the Portland City Council to adopt a comprehensive pesticide ordinance banning the use and sale of synthetic landscaping chemicals and fertilizers within this progressive city.

Co-founder of Portland Protectors, Avery Yale Kamila, put it this way: "The bees are dying; the waters of Casco Bay are polluted with pesticide residues; synthetic fertilizers are causing massive algae bloom. Our kids are getting exposed to harmful pesticides and our pets are walking across lawns sprayed with pesticides. We are fed up and are doing something about it."



Kamila is the mother of an almost three-year-old son who works as a freelance journalist and food columnist at the Portland Press Herald. She co-founded Portland Protectors in the summer of 2015 and has garnered support from over 500 people who've "liked" the organization on Facebook, more than 600 people who've signed the group's Change.org petition, joined mailing lists and actively serve as concerned community members attending city council and related subcommittee meetings as well as talking to residents, business owners and landscape companies to spread the word about the harmful effects of synthetic pesticides and what can be done about it.

In August of 2015 the group submitted a carefully written ordinance to the City Council that would ban the use and sale of synthetic landscaping pesticides and fertilizers within the city. The Council has yet to adopt it and meanwhile, Portland city staff countered with their own ordinance which includes many exemptions – "pretty much everything they're already doing" applying pesticides on city property, she said.

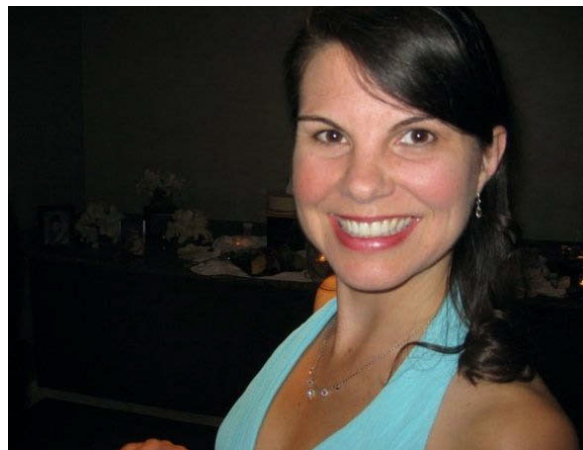
Kamila shared that presently, the city of Portland spends \$10,000 a year to spray Roundup throughout the Arts District and Old Port areas, populated by thousands of tourists annually as well as local residents.

In addition, she said, "Portland budgets \$5,000 a year to spray Roundup in other areas of the city, including around the base of trees, in ornamental display gardens, in parks and wherever invasive plants grow." Another major problem, she said, is the city-owned Riverside Golf Course, which budgeted \$25,000 for synthetic pesticides in 2015, she said.

Several non-profit groups are supporting the efforts of Portland Protectors, including the Friends of Casco Bay, the Portland Pollinator Partnership, the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association and the NOFA Organic Land Care Program, which is exploring the possibility of hosting its intensive professional accreditation course in the Greater Portland area.

Kamila recently wrote a guest editorial, writes regular letters to local newspaper editors and attends City Council meetings as well as meetings of the Council's newly formed "Energy and Sustainability Subcommittee," who met last month to determine the year's work plan.

Last November she and other citizens shared survey results they collected, showing which council representative candidates were in support of pesticide legislation, and she believes helped those candidates get elected in at least two of Portland's districts. In early February 2016 they also released a report called "Playing with Chemicals" including a detailed analysis of chemicals used on the Riverside Golf Course, which she is sending out to local media in the hopes of coverage.



Meanwhile, on Feb. 29, Chip Osborne of Osborne Organics based in Marblehead, Mass. is hosting a workshop titled "Learn How to Transition Turf from Conventional Management Programs to a Natural Approach" from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn. On April 15-16, Beyond Pesticides is hosting their 34th National Pesticide Forum at the University of Southern Maine in Portland – both signs of the state's ever-increasing move towards a less chemical-based approach to land care, said Kamila.

There are presently 25 towns in Maine who have passed some sort of pesticide ordinance, many of them including the banning or restriction of aerial spraying of crops including blueberries and forest trees grown for the paper and wood products industry and/or lobster fishing. These towns include Coplin Plantation, Lebanon, Limestone, New Sweden, Sweden, Rangely, Cranberry Isles, Waterboro, Amherst, Harpswell, Ogunquit, Standish, Wayne, Allagash, Brighton Plantation, Arrowsic, Limerick, Newburgh, Southport, Owl's Head, New Gloucester, Brunswick, Castine and Wells. Kamila heard at a recent meeting that Old Orchard Beach is also working on an ordinance.

Closest to home is South Portland, where a group called Protect South Portland anxiously awaits the public release of a City Council-approved pesticide ordinance to be written by that town's sustainability coordinator that Kamila hopes will set the stage with appropriate language for a comprehensive pesticide ban that could then be adopted by neighboring towns including her home city. It is expected to be released this month.

"I feel optimistic and confident. I feel like we have common sense on our side. We have the independent science on our side and we have the citizens of Portland on our side," said Kamila. "We do have a strong opposition, that's well financed, but they don't have any of those things on their side. I feel like we have a good chance. It's a matter of what we can get the council to wrap their arms around."

For more information, visit Portland Protectors' Facebook page, which Kamila updates regularly:
<https://www.facebook.com/portlandprotectors/?fref=nf>

