

Pesticides And Your Pet

By Sarah Bartash

Everyone loves a lush, green lawn, but not everyone knows the best way to get one. Weeds, insects, and vermin can all be considered "pests," and homeowners may look towards synthetic chemical pesticides to help combat these nuisances. However, many of these chemicals are potentially harmful or even fatal to dogs and cats. In 2008, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center in Urbana, Illinois fielded more than 140,000 calls related to pets exposed to toxic substances. More than 2,000 of those calls were related to lawn care products.

There are many ways your dog could come in contact with pesticides:

- inhaled through the air
- absorbed through the skin after rolling, sitting on, or lying in treated areas
- ingested by eating grass
- by chewing on objects exposed to Pesticides
- drinking out of contaminated food or water bowls
- getting into spilled or improperly stored pesticides
- accidentally being sprayed with a product due to inattention

A small amount of pesticide can have a big effect on your dog. According to Dr. Barney Smith of the Animal Hos-

pital of Verona in Verona, Wisconsin, the dosage and amount of the toxin would influence how sick a dog would become. He noted that, while a smaller dog might become sicker with a smaller amount of toxin, it might be that larger dogs have more of a chance of getting into the pesticides in the first place, since they usually spend more time outside near where pesticides are kept and used.

Some scientific studies have indicated that certain synthetic pesticides may be cancer-causing, so to be safe, prevent exposure to protect you and your pet. If you choose to use a pesticide, you should be aware that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reviews all toxic chemicals and labels them with a CAUTION, WARNING, or DANGER informational label, with caution being the lowest toxicity level. Be sure to read any labels and follow the instructions for safe use. If you use a professional lawn care service, do not hesitate to ask to read the label of the pesticide product being applied.

Another choice is to "go green" with a service like NaturaLawn. Jim Peterson opened NaturaLawn of America in Madison, Wisconsin in 2003, and is committed to using natural, organic based seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers to help people achieve that summertime dream of a great lawn. "We want to build the soil's health and give the turf plants (grass) the best chance to grow healthy and compete against the pests."

NaturaLawn uses 80-90% less chemicals than a traditional lawn care company. Peterson is confident in the safety of his product and even brings his two dogs to his shop with him.

"The use of pesticides is not (in itself) bad," Peterson contends. Like Dr. Smith, he agrees that "it's all about how, when, where, what quantity is used and why." For example, antibacterial hand soap is a pesticide that kills bacteria. It carries a "caution" label, but can be used properly by people every day.

NaturaLawn works to eliminate the need for almost all pesticides. When pesticides are used, they are of a low or targeted toxicity, are used in small amounts, and are water-fast, meaning that once dry, they do not re-wet or wash away (if, for instance, there was a rain shower soon after application.)

One natural pesticide used by NaturaLawn helps combat unwanted anthills. The trick? Four or five applications of dry Cream of Wheat cereal poured directly on the hill. Ants cannot digest the cereal and they die. Repeated applications throughout the season insure that the colony is fully destroyed. Another natural pesticide is corn gluten. Applied correctly, it is a natural fertilizer for turf that helps suppress some undesirable grasses, such as crab grass. It's a waste product of the process used to make corn syrup and corn starch, and it is nontoxic to pets (note: "nontoxic" does



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